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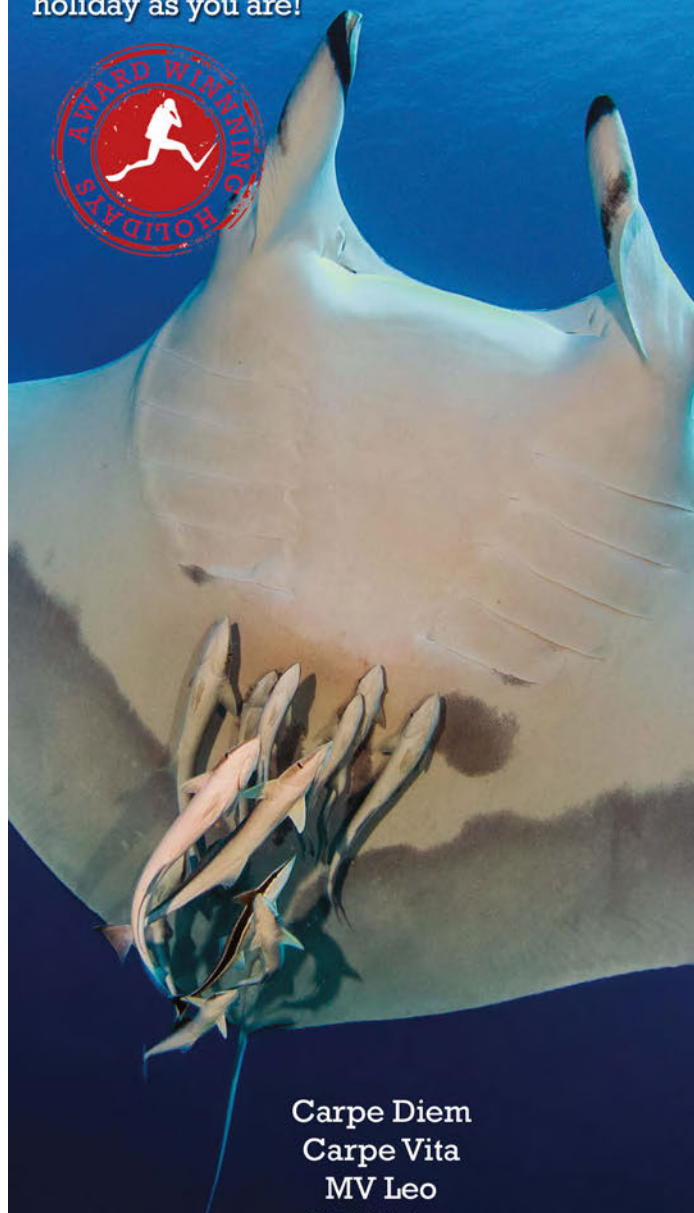
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STEVE WEINMAN, EDITOR

FIRST IN



LIGHTNESS OF DARK WATERS

FLICKING THROUGH my first diving logbook, I realised that I hadn't opened it for more than 20 years. I was looking up my first night dive, because all I could remember was how cold the September wind had been as I changed into a damp semi-dry near Meanish Pier in Skye.

The entry filled in a few details: *"Started in thick kelp looking for a dropped knife and it took a while to get orientated."* Now I look back through them, my early logs seem to be littered with equipment dropped and only sometimes recovered, although on this occasion I'm not convinced the knife was mine.

"I was happier when we hit sand and I saw a large lobster sitting out in the open," the entry continues, and it's appropriate that my first sighting should have been of a crustacean, because their nocturnal emergence characterises so many night dives.

"We turned off our torches and watched the phosphorescence," the log goes on – I should have written *"bioluminescence"*, strictly speaking, but what did I know? A procession of scorpionfish, squat lobsters, velvet crabs and small fish followed – half an hour at 10m, then back into that unforgiving wind to get changed and head off for warming refreshment.

I can't say the dive was unforgettable because I had to look it up, but the details soon came flooding back, as they often do once our memory-banks have been tickled. Logbooks are great like that, and this month we review some of the digital dive-log apps available free.

But the reason for my nostalgia was that Richard Aspinall had written an article on night dives for this month's issue, based on the premise that many divers don't bother with them, and that quite a few don't really like the idea. He wanted to make a case for why they should overcome their misgivings.

I queried his assumption, but that very evening met a woman who said she loved diving but doubted whether she would ever want to do a night dive. For her, diving was all about enjoying great warmwater visibility, and to venture under water when the sun had gone down seemed perverse.

This month's *Big Question* reveals that the majority of you do make a point of including night dives on trips – mainly, you say, because the "night shift" is just so different and interesting. Of the remaining substantial third of readers, many clearly do dive at night but can take it or leave it.

We all know the feeling – you've done two or three daytime dives, showered and changed, you're ready to chat through your experiences at the bar or spend time with the family, and the idea of getting wet again and being late for the evening meal doesn't seem all that appealing.

I went on looking through my logbooks – memories of multiple torch-beams and glowsticks on the first overseas night-dive in Gozo, magical night-into-day dawn dives in Indonesia, whitetips hunting by our lights in the Maldives, fluo-diving in the Caribbean and one unaccountable dive in a normally "feature-rich" Coral Triangle destination with a couple new to night-diving on which we failed to find a single unusual living thing – *"It isn't usually like this, honestly!"*

The disappointments have been rare, the rewards great and the surprises numerous, as most of you know. Anyone who has yet to try night-diving, please do read Richard's article.

"Sorry, what do you mean you've finished serving dinner...?"

**'MY EARLY LOGS
SEEM LITTERED
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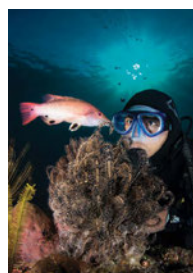
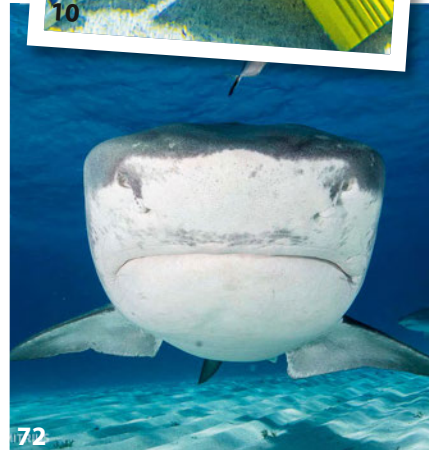
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Cover shot:
Diver eyeballs
wrasse in Bali,
by Nigel Wade

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Steve and Cindy Moore, April 2015



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Sexist and hypocritical

I read your editorial about sexism with a certain amount of cynicism, but I gave you the benefit of the doubt and took you at face value (*Closing the Gender Gap, First In, June*).

Then I turned two pages and was confronted with a full-page advert using a sexy woman who appears to be naked to display a face-mask. That gives the lie to your claimed understanding.

Sexism isn't just calling the woman on the boat the tea-maker, it's also the overwhelming presentation of women as eye candy who are there for the pleasure of men. It's the use of our bodies to sell pieces of technical dive equipment without any mention at all of the properties of that piece of equipment.

It's treating us as whores whose primary requirement is to be sexy and, oh yes, we might be allowed to dive too provided we are young, slim and pretty.

That throws up another piece of the sexism pattern, since most women's dive kit is not made in large sizes, whereas men's gear (which is usually far too long for we cute little girls) comes in a much wider range of sizes.

If you, your magazine and your advertisers genuinely regarded women as equals you would not use our bodies in that way. The result is that every woman who opens your magazine is presented with evidence that diving is still highly sexist and that we will be treated as inferior objects rather than competent divers in our own right.

JANE COBB

Prop-guards are a must

In your news pages recently you carried an item about a father and son who suffered head injuries when they were hit by a dive-boat's propellers (\$12m *Payout For Boat-Prop Injuries, July*).

We've heard a lot of these stories down the years, though not necessarily involving divers, and today I read in the paper about a British diver off Koh Tao in Thailand who nearly lost a leg when she was hit by a boat's propeller.

Reports said that she was struck by a dive-boat, although not the one she was diving from. And this comes just a few months after another woman was killed off Koh Tao after being hit by a prop.

Divers are at considerable risk when they surface, and I have long wondered why all boats are not required by law to be fitted with a propeller-guard.

These items are not expensive, they don't affect a boat's performance and, quite apart from the safety aspect, they also prevent fouling.

Enacting such a requirement internationally would of course be very difficult, but would it not be a good idea if dive-boat operators led the way? After all, they're the ones whose occupants are milling about in the water before and after dives.

If readers' dive-boats don't have prop-guards, I suggest they start asking – why not?

MAGGIE BAKER, BERKHAMSTED, HERTS

My family and I are just back from a fabulous week in Sharm el Sheikh thanks to my son Patrick winning the London International Dive Show (LIDS) Scuba Youth Zone competition earlier in the year.

Learning the news of our amazing prize, flights to Sharm with a week's stay at the Falcon Naama Blue hotel and full PADI Open Water Diver training for any unqualified divers in the party, was the perfect antidote to a wet and windy evening in February!

Our "fixer" Mary from Nemo Promotions organised the whole shebang and before too long Patrick (12) and daughter Holly (13) were enrolled on the PADI Junior OWD e-learning programme and getting to grips with dive theory.

There's nothing like a bit of brother/sister rivalry to get the competitive streak going, and both completed the modules and test in fine style.

As sharp as ever, they interrogated me on my final test score but alas I was unable to remember it, and fled from the room mumbling something about data protection...

Elite Diving (Divers United), which kindly provided the OWD training, has a great set-up: good admin, two well-equipped boats and fantastic instructors all wrapped up with a great sense of humour.

We arrived at the resort in glorious 32° temperatures, gripped with excitement (the kids) and a tinge of apprehension (us parents!) but within a few minutes of meeting G we knew we were in good hands.

While the kids were having fun with their confined-water dives, I made spectacular use of the time with trips to Ras Mohammed and the Thistlegorm, and Mrs J (dive widow) topped up the tan. A perfect win-win-win scenario and one

I hope to repeat for many years to come!

Big thanks to Alec and Hossan as super dive-guides on the wrecks and reefs – dolphins and a turtle on dive three was a right result.

The centre of Na'ama Bay, just two minutes' walk from our hotel, has everything you need – bars, restaurants and souvenir shops enough to keep the most ardent bargain-hunter occupied.

Our evenings were spent relaxing over dinner talking about the day's diving (increasingly embellished stories of bar remaining, weight-loss (not the dieting kind) and poor or the best vis – how they picked this behaviour up I don't know!) and, of course, the amazing array of marine life.

By the middle of the week under G's expert tuition PADI got two new qualified members and it was a short hop to our first boat-dive as a family. Proud Dad looked on while they kitted up and prepared for another new experience.

From that moment I could sense that keeping them out of the water was going to be as difficult as getting them to eat Brussels sprouts at Christmas.

"I need my own dive computer now Dad, don't I?" and "When can I do my

nitrox course, Dad?" dominated the rest of the boat trip (and holiday) and I can already see the bank balance draining away with two more dive hungry appetites to feed.

On the plus side, it's three against one on the holiday destination front now, and that dive-camera upgrade I've been thinking of would be an investment to capture our treasured family memories, wouldn't it?

One thing I know is a dead cert – we'll be back at LIDS in full force come February, and in addition to hunting for all sorts of kit we'll be entering as many competitions as we can!

MARTIN JACKSON, CHESHUNT, HERTS



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Diver pleads guilty to fraud over illegally held 16th-century cannon

A COMMERCIAL DIVER has been convicted of the illegal possession of three 16th century Dutch cannons and their fraudulent sale.

Vincent Woolsgrove of Ramsgate, Kent pleaded guilty at Southampton Crown Court in mid-June in relation to cannon raised from the wreck of HMS *London* in the Thames Estuary.

Woolsgrove reported the raising of five cannon back in 2007 – two bronze items from the *London*, which was true, and the three Dutch pieces, 24-pounders originally from Amsterdam, which he claimed had been raised off North Foreland, in international waters, so avoiding transfer of ownership to the British Government.

Having been awarded title to the three Dutch cannon, as the MCA was unable to prove at that time that they were Crown property, Woolsgrove then sold them at auction for £50,000 to an American private buyer.

In 2011 a joint operation was undertaken by the MCA, Kent & Essex Police and Historic England (formerly English Heritage), acting on



Pictured: Cannon raised from HMS *London*.
Left: Vincent Woolsgrove.



information regarding heritage crime. A search warrant was obtained and Woolsgrove's house in Ramsgate searched.

In his garden the MCA found a bronze 16th century Zeirikzee cannon in a desalination tank along with a considerable amount of other wreck

items including copper, lead, tin and glass ingots, and ships' bells.

Interviewed, Woolsgrove admitted that he had a further two unreported bronze cannon, from an Armada wreck, stored at his girlfriend's house.

The breakthrough regarding the Dutch cannon he had previously reported as having been raised off North Foreland came with the

discovery of photographs on his computer showing the cannon being recovered off Southend, from the *London* site.

Research commissioned by the MCA from the Dutch heritage authorities, Charles Trollope, a world authority on muzzle-loading cannons and Frank Fox, an American author on 16th-17th British naval history established that the cannons recovered by Woolsgrove had indeed ended up on the *London*.

They were originally issued to the Dutch vessels *Groote Liefde* and *St Mattheus* to attack the English fleet during the first Anglo-Dutch War in 1653 and, when the ships were captured by the English, their cannon were taken as prizes and put aboard the *London*.

Woolsgrove will be sentenced at Southampton Crown Court on 4 September. Asked if any further prosecution was possible regarding the other illegal finds uncovered in the raid, the MCA told **DIVER** that "ongoing investigations" remained and that it "wouldn't be right to comment further at this time". ■

ARMADA CANNON RAISED

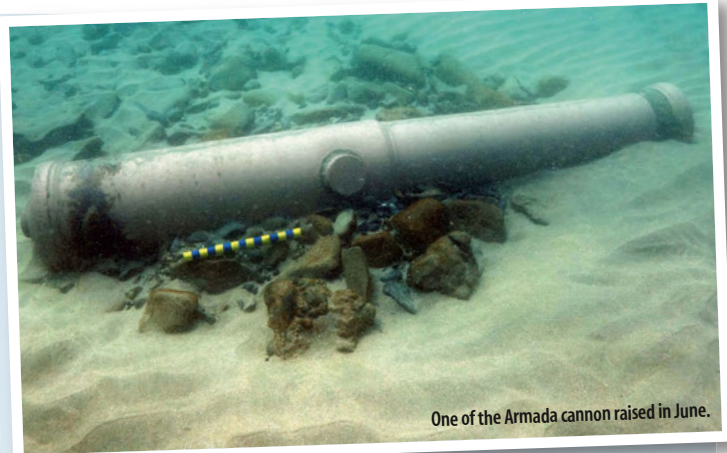
BRONZE CANNON and other artefacts thought to be from a 16th century Spanish Armada fleet wreck have been raised off western Ireland by governmental archaeologists.

April storms disturbed the seabed to reveal the materials which include "a number of cannon" in "excellent condition", says the Government. Recovery operations begun in June were set to take "a number of weeks".

As **DIVER** went to press in late June, two cannon had been raised, with more to follow. Three had already been brought up from the site a few years ago, when different parts of the wreck were exposed.

The newly raised guns reinforce the impression that the wreck is that of *La Juliana*, one of the Armada fleet's armed merchant vessels.

One is inscribed with the date



One of the Armada cannon raised in June.



Engraving on cannon of St Matrona of Catalonia.



Twelve-spoke 1.3m-diameter wheel from gun-carriage.

1570, the year in which *La Juliana* was built in Barcelona. It also carries a depiction of Catalonia's St Matrona.

The guns were recovered by the Underwater Archaeology Unit of Ireland's National Monuments Service, administered by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht. They will be conserved by the National Museum of Ireland.

The 32-gun *La Juliana* weighed 860 tons and could carry 325 soldiers in addition to its 70 crew. ■

TWO GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS SET IN EGYPT

TWO NEW GUINNESS World Records related to seawater scuba diving have been set – and both have featured Egyptian divers.

One is for time spent submerged and the other for the number of divers participating simultaneously in an underwater clean-up.

Capt Walaa Hafez set the Guinness World Record for The Longest Open Saltwater Scuba Dive by remaining submerged at Sharm el Naga, 25 miles from Hurghada, for 51hr 24min 13sec.

The dive, carried out from 4-6 June,

beat a record of 51hr 4min set in the USA last September. Walaa was supported by a team of 25 experts.

A 12-minute video of the dive can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3TzoDkRsVs&sns=fb

Ahmed Gabr, who already holds Guinness World Records for The Deepest Scuba Dive (Male) and The Deepest Scuba Dive in Sea Water at 332.35m, organised the record-breaking clean-up off Dahab on 5 June, World Environment Day.

In setting the Guinness World Record for The Most Participants in An Underwater Clean-Up (Single Venue), the event attracted 614 Egyptian and foreign divers – more than double the old record of 300 divers set in the United Arab Emirates last year. Gabr had originally hoped for about 400.

Egypt's Minister of Tourism Khaled Ramy, a keen diver, took part in the clean-up. Youngest participant was Indigo Bolandrini, 13, a PADI Junior Master Scuba Diver, www.facebook.com/AhmedGabrDiver ■



LAURA DINIATHIS

Piper Alpha rescue diver dies

A DIVER WHO HELPED save the lives of three men during the *Piper Alpha* oil-rig disaster of 1988, in which 167 oil-rig workers died, was found dead in the River Shannon not far from his home in Limerick, Ireland in mid-June.

South African-born Gareth Parry-Davies, 59, who was honoured by the Queen for his gallantry, had

suffered a number of stress-related difficulties since the fire.

He was said to have bottled up his experience to such an extent that his wife was not made fully aware of his actions until a book, *Piper Alpha, Fire in the Night* by Stephen McGinty, was published on the disaster's 20th anniversary in 2008. ■

Britain's silver recovery backfires

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT has launched an inquiry into procurement exercises after a contract awarded to US company Odyssey Marine Exploration for the salvage of silver from the Atlantic wreck ss *Gairsoppa* led to action by another salvor over loss of opportunity to save the cargo.

In a Parliamentary questions session in early June it was confirmed that Blue Water Recoveries, based in West Sussex, had "complained and subsequently made a claim against the Department [of Transport] concerning a procurement undertaken in 2009, contract awarded on 8 January, 2010" and that the DoT

"has now entered into an out-of-court settlement for £15 million plus costs".

The DoT was "carrying out a review of the conduct of the procurement exercise and the subsequent management of the contract to Odyssey Marine Exploration Inc including the financial arrangements".

Odyssey recovered 2792 bars of silver, weighing 110 tonnes. Under its arrangement with Odyssey, the Government's share of the *Gairsoppa* silver recovery was £9.6 million – 20% of the silver's £48 million value.

After the latest settlement, the Government has therefore ended up more than £5 million out of pocket. ■

THE BIG QUESTION

Who are the night owls?

Do you make a point of including night-dives on a diving holiday? We asked you last month. Just over two-thirds of you say that you do, and of those who said no it's clear from the comments that you're not necessarily averse but don't go out of your way to do them. Then there's the fact that beer may already have flowed when darkness falls...

NO

"Night dives are over-rated in my opinion. Better off going to the pub instead." Bill Weddle

"I see them as a bonus rather than a key part of the trip." Faye Wilde

"Normally had a beer or two by the time it's dark on hol." Mark Lovick

"Not a big lover of night-diving after being caught up in a fishing-line on a night dive in Malta, though it was good to see the fisherman's face when we came out of the water." Colin Rotheram

"Modern LED lights are so powerful that a few divers in the water and it looks like daylight; the fish think morning has arrived." David Hall-Davies

"Being on holiday with non-divers means some compromises. I'll do a night dive if I can fit it in, but not make a point of it." Ian MacLeod

"I use the night to soak up the life of the place." Neil Thornton

"Not always possible with the operator." Dave Horton

YES

"The creatures you see are totally different to those on day dives – if you don't night dive, you're missing half the picture." Arianna Moretti

"Always good to see different behaviours at night." Patrick Wadsworth

"On liveaboards they often seem to be offered to meet a contractual obligation rather than because they're worth doing." Neil Turton

"I regard a night dive as the highlight of any holiday." Chris Goddard

"It is a must, just a shame a lot of dive centres don't do dusk dives so divers can see the changing of the reefs." Nicholas Ray

"Depends a little on location but as well as seeing a different aspect of a site they can allow a family day that is not a non-diving day." Bill Gabb

"It's so different to daytime dives, and in clear water when there's moonlight, it can be magical!" Tess Curnow

"There is always a surprise waiting on a night dive." Sharon Meadows

"Absolutely love night dives, especially when your head plays mind games – trying to tell you that there is something larger than you out there in the dark water waiting to gobble you up!" Debbie Evans

"Arranging a night dive in the UK can be a logistical nightmare, so it's a welcome bonus not to be missed abroad!" Terry Nolan

"I love night diving and can never understand why so many people on trips opt out of doing them." Philip Medcalf

"I love a good night dive. You can't see a lot most of the time, but when you do you see more than ever!" Stuart Hingle

"I've had some average night dives but I've had some fantastic ones (whitetip sharks hunting on the reef in the Maldives!)." Jim Mallon

"It's not a proper diving holiday if there isn't a night dive." Theresa

"Absolutely yes! The reef is a different world at night!" Jeiram Jeyaratnam

Go to www.divernet.com to answer the next Big Question and you could win a £118 Luxfer 3-litre compact emergency pony cylinder from Sea & Sea. More on Luxfer cylinders at www.dive-team.com. Latest winner is Tracey Henderson.



THE NEXT BIG QUESTION

Unbonded booking agencies have started offering discounted liveaboard holidays online – would you book through one?

Answer yes or no, and feel free to comment

Irish inquests cover trio of fatalities

IRELAND'S CORK CITY coroner's court has recently heard two inquests into the deaths of three divers in Irish waters.

A double fatality occurred with the deaths of Stephen Clarke, 65, from Capel Dorking, Surrey, UK and Jonathan Scott, 61, from Morley, Western Australia. The court heard how the pair died while undertaking a dive on the German submarine *U260* in 45m of water, two miles south of High Island near Union Hall, West Cork in early July last year.

Dive-computer records showed that, having spent 17 minutes on the bottom, two minutes longer than planned, the men ascended rapidly from 42 to 24m, then descended again to 32m before making a rapid ascent to the surface.

The boat's skipper, Jerry Smith, told the inquest that Clarke gave the OK signal before the pair dived again, probably in an attempt to complete decompression. From a depth of 20m, however, Scott sank to the seabed and Clarke surfaced unconscious.

Clarke was recovered aboard the dive boat and given CPR before being airlifted to Cork University Hospital, where it was confirmed that he had died. Scott's body was recovered from the seabed that afternoon.

Post mortem examinations showed that both men had died from a combination of drowning and barotrauma.

Diving safety specialist Nick Bailey of the UK's Health & Safety Executive, which examined the men's regulators, told the inquest that both may have found it difficult to draw air at depth, their mouthpieces failing to meet inhalation-pressure requirements for the depth to which they dived.

They were described as highly experienced, Clarke having carried out more than 1200 and Scott nearly 500 dives over the past 10 years.

The coroner recorded a verdict of death by misadventure for both men.

A second inquest in Cork heard how John McNally, 46, from Bruff in Co Limerick, died after using up his air while trying to free the shotline of his

diving team's boat and getting into difficulty with a rapid ascent.

McNally had travelled with members of Limerick and University of Limerick SACs to dive with members of Blackwater SAC.

The group had completed its second dive of the day, on the 18m-deep trawler *Star Immaculate 11* 500m off Roche's Point.

There was difficulty in retrieving the shotline and McNally offered to redescend to free it, going in with no buddy or safety check.

Some team-members thought that the shotline had snarled with a lobster-pot line about 5m under water, and that McNally was going in to attend to this, while McNally saw the task as going to the seabed to free the shotline weight.

One diver, Eamon Maloney, snorkelled out as watch cover. Once McNally had descended, Maloney could see only his bubbles.

The line was freed before Maloney saw a burst of bubbles, then none.

Diver Mike Reidy recovered

McNally's unconscious body from the bottom within 10 minutes and noted that his air cylinder was empty. With Dr Tom O'Donnell, a former medical advisor to the Irish Underwater Council, among the divers, McNally was given CPR after the onboard defibrillator failed and was rushed ashore.

Paramedics managed to restore a pulse but McNally was pronounced dead at Cork University Hospital.

Nick Bailey of the HSE in Britain told the inquest that McNally appeared to have gone through his air supply quickly while working to free the 25kg shot weight. According to his dive-computer, he then made a rapid ascent of 10m in 10 seconds.

At that point he halted for a few seconds in mid-water before descending again to the seabed.

A post mortem found that McNally had suffered an acute pulmonary oedema due to drowning, with associated barotrauma.

A verdict of death by misadventure was recorded. ■

Shark Shield boost

LATEST TESTS have indicated that a commercially available shark deterrent does seem to work effectively. Researchers at the University of Western Australia's Oceans Institute fitted the unit, Shark Shield, to a baited test rig and compared results with an identical rig with no deterrent device fitted.

Based on the tests carried out with reef sharks off Western Australia and with great whites off South Africa, it was found that all sharks that approached the control rig touched or took the bait, while fewer than 10% that approached the Shark Shield-equipped rig did so.

The deterrent, manufactured in Western Australia, emits a strong electrical field that irritates a shark's electro-receptor system. ■



NOW THAT'S GREAT!

THIS IS THE MOMENT when a giant great white shark circled a diving cage off Guadalupe, Mexico. The still comes from a video posted on social media by Mauricio Hoyos Padilla, who exited the cage to 'high-five' the creature, reaching up to touch its pectoral fin as it passed by.

The shark's size is anyone's guess based on the footage, but few would argue that it has to be one of the biggest examples ever seen. It is acknowledged that the great white can reach about 6.5m in length. ■

Trailblazing tigers

RESEARCHERS WHO HAVE tagged and followed 24 tiger sharks over a period of three years have established that the creatures undertake long migrations, travelling annually between the open North Atlantic and the Caribbean.

Many of the sharks displayed navigation skills more usually associated with such creatures as turtles and birds in returning regularly to specific breeding sites in the Caribbean.

The work was carried out by the Guy Harvey Research Institute at Nova Southeastern University, Florida and the UK's Marine Biological Association in Plymouth.

The findings have been published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, www.nature.com ■

Ocean Giants with our Researchers & Experts



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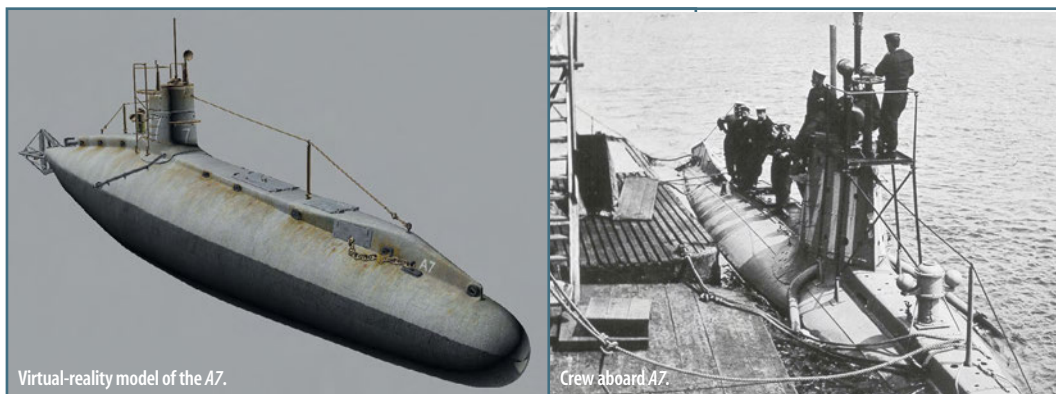
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Virtual-reality model of the A7.

Crew aboard A7.

A FULL REPORT on the A7 Project, conducted by the Shipwrecks and History in Plymouth Sound (SHIPS) Project, has been published.

The early Royal Navy submarine A7 was sunk in 1914 with the loss of 11 crew, while on a training exercise in Whitsand Bay, Plymouth. It was protected under military legislation in 2011 and this is the first time that civilian divers have been granted a licence by the MoD to examine the remains of a military wreck on which all diving is normally banned.

The SHIPS team surveyed and recorded the A-Class sub in great detail last year. Archaeological contributors to the non-intrusive survey included the Nautical Archaeology Society and Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Maritime Archaeology Society.

Surveyors publish findings on WW1 A-Class submarine

3D multibeam image.



PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY / SHIPS PROJECT

The survey involved a geophysical assessment; photographic and written records of the hull, its fittings and plate thicknesses; and a 3D virtual

reality (VR) computer model of the wreck and its surroundings.

The wreck lies upright on a seabed of flat, firm clay, in 40m of water. It is part-buried, with the stern particularly well dug in.

The new report costs £30 from British Archaeological Reports, at www.barpublishing.com. The A7 Project can be followed at www.promare.co.uk and at www.facebook.com/TheShipsProject

The SHIPS Project is funded by US charitable research foundation ProMare and is managed by 3H Consulting in Plymouth. ■

SCOTTISH PLAN

PLANS FOR PROTECTED marine zones have been outlined by the Scottish Parliament, with proposed measures including a ban on fishing activities that harm the seabed.

The Marine Conservation Society says the move follows the collective Scottish Environment LINK 'Don't Take The P' campaign, in which "several thousand MCS supporters joined many others in writing to the Scottish Government calling for real protection in designated protected areas".

"We will now be looking closely at the newly drafted measures to make sure they fulfil the clear and widespread public expectation that MPAs should be managed to recover the ecological health of our seas," said Calum Duncan, Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce and Scotland Programme Manager, Marine Conservation Society.

"We are making a strong social, economic and environmental case for meaningful management that protects our precious seabed and boosts future opportunities for sustainable fishing." ■



WET LEGO

VISITORS TO SEA LIFE London Aquarium have had some amusing objects to spot of late in the main Ocean Display tank, as part of the centre's LEGO City Deep Sea Explorer Experience, which runs until the end of August.

Positioned in the million-litre

tank are a host of items made from LEGO bricks, things having kicked off in June with items including a dive-mask, fins and air cylinders, camera, radio and wrench.

Visitors are encouraged to create their own model sea creatures in the LEGO-build zones. ■

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Brit diver hurt by prop in Thailand

A BRITISH DIVER was seriously injured in Thailand in mid-June when a dive-boat ran over her.

Alice Davies, 20, from Southampton, suffered a severe leg injury in the incident, which occurred off Koh Tao as she surfaced in a group learning to dive with the company Scuba Shack.

The boat was run by another dive company, Roctopus.

Davies was taken to a clinic on Koh Tao for emergency treatment and transferred by speedboat to Thai International Hospital on Koh Samui for surgery to severe lacerations and broken bones.

Afterwards she was reported to be in a stable condition but remained in hospital for a further period before a return to the UK was possible.

"A motorboat, *Thanicha Namchok*, from dive company Roctopus, was carrying diving equipment and had been stuck on some rocks very close to where Ms Davies and her class were getting out of the water," Lt Col Napa Senatip of Koh Tao Police told press.

"Boonrod Klubnak, the motorboat driver, was trying to free the boat by speeding up the engine, and Ms Davies was sucked into the propeller blade by the force of the engine."

He added: "The propeller broke both of the bones in her lower right leg, but the leg was not severed."

"She was in surgery for many hours, but it went well and she is now stable. We are waiting for an official report from the hospital before we press any charges."

Koh Tao was the scene of a boat propeller-related death last December, when a 22-year-old Norwegian woman died after being struck on the head.

Again the diver was under supervision in shallow water with one company while the boat was operated by another.

The vessel's skipper, who had just put his own complement of divers into the sea, told police that he did not realise that others divers were nearby. He was however later charged with causing death by reckless driving. ■

...as New Zealand prop-death dive operator is found guilty

A CHARTER-BOAT COMPANY in Whangarei, New Zealand has been ordered to pay damages to the family of a diver killed when its dive-boat ran over him in the Poor Knights islands in February last year.

Maritime New Zealand brought charges against The Dive Spot and its director Mark Barnes, 59, who skippered the company's catamaran *Pacific Hideaway*, over the death of Bruce Porter, 56.

Porter had emigrated with his wife from the UK in 2008. He was diving with Auckland's Western Underwater Dive Club, which had chartered *Pacific Hideaway*.

After a crewman told Barnes that the anchor had come free, Barnes communicated this to Porter.

The diver misunderstood the message and continued to dive, unbeknown to Barnes, who then started the boat up and put it into gear while Porter remained beneath the vessel.

It was maintained that, under

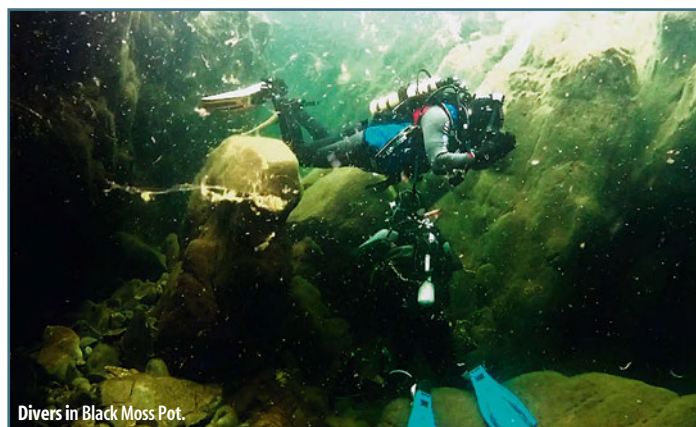
Section 15 of the Health & Safety in Employment Act 1992, Barnes, who showed great remorse over the incident, should never have made the request of Porter that he free the boat's fouled anchor, and had failed to ensure his safety.

Judge John Macdonald ordered The Dive Spot to pay a fine of \$50,000 and an additional \$50,000 in reparation to Porter's family.

Barnes personally was ordered to pay a \$25,000 fine and \$30,000 in reparation.

In a recent case in the USA, a father and son who both suffered severe head injuries when they were hit by a dive-boat's propellers in the Florida Keys were awarded \$12 million in compensation (*News*, July).

It was judged that the boat's skipper had failed to keep a proper lookout, exacerbated by bad positioning of the vessel's life-raft, and that there had been inadequate communication between the skipper and other crew-members. ■



Divers in Black Moss Pot.

DIVERS HEAD FOR REMOTE SITE IN LAKE DISTRICT

SIX MEMBERS of York's Excalibur BSAC branch have carried out an unusual dive in the Lake District – by hiking cross-country to a remote river pool the underwater features of which had almost certainly never been eyed before, at least by scuba-divers.

The dive, in late June, was at Black Moss Pot in the far west of Ambleside, after a near-5-mile walk with all their diving kit from Stonethwaite and a gradual, 187m ascent to the site.

The pool lies below a small waterfall and runs for about 60m before the river narrows again.

Organiser Mark Barrow, a self-confessed remote inland rivers fanatic, put together the team. Other divers were Dave Garnett, David Goldsmith, father and son Matthew and Daniel Roberts, and Peter Roddam.

"It was a long and tiresome walk, but once at the pot it felt kind of surreal knowing what we were going to be doing and that we were possibly the first to use scuba there," Barrow told **DIVER**. Entering the water, the divers were thrilled by the "excellent vis, at least 15m" and seeing small brown trout in the 4m-deep pool.

"We all headed down for the first run of the Pot, finning slowly," said Barrow. "It felt amazing to be in such a unique site; from the smoothness of the rock in some places you could tell

it had been sculpted over hundreds of years." When they reached the end of the pool they "headed back up", though visibility was reduced by algae on the rocks having been disturbed.

"We explored loads of nooks and crannies and went into every corner to basically look and take it all in," said Barrow.

"At one point I sat on a rock under water and just watched everyone dive up and down – it was fantastic."

After "five or six runs up and down the Pot and trying to get close to the brown trout, which was never going to happen, it was time to get out and have a cuppa". Barrow then "had a snorkel up and down the Pot", the water being "gin-clear by this time".

Further fun was had frolicking in the area of the waterfall, under which there was a large basin, and once out of the water and stripped of scuba gear some of the divers made a 5m jump into the waterfall basin from the adjacent rock face. "Once was enough!" said Barrow.

It was a "very slow walk back... so much harder on the feet and legs", but "once back at the car we all had time to reflect on an amazing day".

Would he do it again? "Oh yes, in fact I'm heading back in August with my son." More on Barrow's Facebook page, Beneath British Waters. ■



The Excalibur dive team.

Tyro is freediving world champ

A COMPLETE NEWCOMER to the world of competitive freediving has burst onto the scene and taken gold at AIDA's Individual Pool World Championships in Belgrade.

Alice Hickson, a swimming coach who took up freediving just eight months ago, swam 174m in the Dynamic No Fins category, in which the competitor swims underwater lengths of a pool with no equipment.

Swimming earlier in the competition, Hickson first covered 153m to break Rebecca Coales' British women's record of 145m, before extending it substantially to a mark just shy of the 176m British men's record, held by John Moorcroft.

The world women's record of 182m was set by Russian Natalia Molchanova

in June 2013.

Hickson is now ranked third in the world.

"I've only ever done one other competition so I didn't know what to expect, but so far it's been amazing and totally overwhelming, in a good way," said Hickson.

"The day before the competition I started getting really nervous and doubted my ability to compete against some of the best people in the sport. But then I remembered why I was here, for experience and to enjoy it, so I told myself: 'Just do your best.'"

"Alice looks set to be a world-class athlete and we're excited to watch her journey as it unfolds," said Beci Ryan, of the British Freediving Association. ■



DAAN VERHOEVEN

SHARK-FIN MEGAHAUL SEIZED

A STAGGERING HAUL of sharks fins, numbering about 200,000, has been seized in Ecuador just before they were due to be exported illegally to Asia.

Raids were made on nine locations in the city of Manta and six people arrested. Shark-fishing is banned in Ecuadorian waters, the sale of shark products being possible only if they are sourced from animals caught accidentally.

The haul was calculated to represent the deaths of about 50,000 sharks. Ecuadorian Interior Minister Jose Serrano told press that the raids had "dealt a major blow to an international network that trafficked shark fins".

He added: "We must end these criminal networks that are only interested in their own economic interests and are destroying the eco-system." ■

MEET HISTORIC ENGLAND

ENGLISH HERITAGE, which has for years overseen matters relating to English terrestrial and maritime heritage, has given way to Historic England.

The EH tag is now retained purely for a new independent charity responsible for looking after the National Heritage Collection of some 400 historic terrestrial sites.

Maritime administration including, for instance, the designation of protected marine sites under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 and the appointment of licensees to manage such sites, comes under the HE remit.

Historic England (www.historicengland.org.uk) has two national offices, in London and Swindon, the latter holding the Historic England Archive. A terrestrial and maritime

archaeological centre is located at Fort Cumberland in Portsmouth, and there are also nine local offices.

London National Office: 138-142 Holborn, London EC1N 2ST, 020 7973 3700, customers@historicengland.org.uk

Swindon National Office: The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EH, 01793 445050, customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Fort Cumberland: Fort Cumberland Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire, PO4 9LD, 023 9285 6704, fort.cumberland@historicengland.org.uk

Maritime-related enquiries can be directed to maritime@historicengland.org.uk. Follow HE maritime matters on [twitter@hemaritime](https://twitter.com/hemaritime)

HE Customer Services can be telephoned at 0370 3330608. ■

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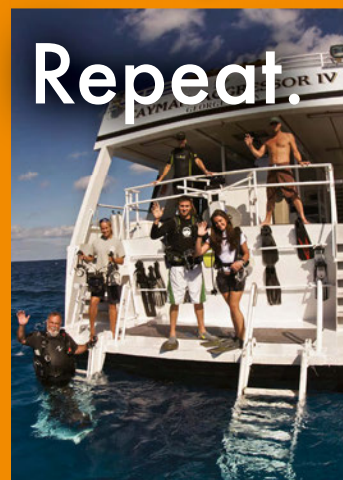
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ARCHAEOLOGISTS MAKE THEIR CASE FOR EXEMPTIONS FROM MARINE LICENSING

THE NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Society (NAS) has put forward a proposal that licencing for certain types of marine archaeological work should cease.

The plan has been submitted to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Historic England (HE) on behalf of the NAS itself and a raft of stakeholder organisations.

The move comes after a period in which some research groups and protected wreck-site licensees have come to regard MMO licensing charges for archaeological work as in some cases unsustainable if such work is to continue on historic wrecks in English waters.

At their most extreme, licence fees of up to £2000 have been levied on amateur divers for archaeological activity.

A number of wreck-site licensees have threatened to withdraw from their positions and hand back their licences as originally administered by English Heritage and now by its successor, Historic England.

HE is reported to have sympathy with the plight of archaeological divers under certain circumstances.

Co-signatories to the NAS-prepared document are the Association of Protected Wreck Licensees, Bournemouth University, British Sub-Aqua Club, Chartered Institute for Archaeology, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Maritime Archaeology Society, Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee, Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust, Mary Rose Trust and contractor MSDS Marine.

The proposal divides archaeological practices seen as needing exemption into two main categories: any marine archaeological site, and sites designated as protected areas.

Elements for any site include the laying of shotlines or buoyed markers, the use of boats or floating containers to install survey or recording equipment, and the placing of materials to stabilise seabeds to protect underwater cultural heritage.

Further elements for protected sites, as designated under both civil

and military legislation, include the laying of markers to define restricted areas, the creation of dive trails and the authorised removal of objects or excavations.

A rundown of the state of the protected warship *Hazardous Prize* (1706) in Bracklesham Bay, West Sussex is given as an example of a wreck-site in dire need of survey and protective measures but on which marine archaeologists cannot realistically work, particularly on a regular basis, unless they are granted exemption from licensing charges.

The MMO has said that it will discuss the suggested exemptions with HE and the devolved administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland before responding to the proposal.

For full documentation of the proposal and an appendix on the warship *Hazardous Prize*, go to www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/content/marine-licensing-exemptions-archaeology ■

Who needs bone?

AN ANCIENT FOSSIL unearthed in Western Australia has shown that sharks have followed a more sophisticated evolutionary route than previously thought.

The 75cm fossilised skeleton, dated to 380 million years, was found in the Kimberley region by palaeontologist John Long, of Flinders University.

It shows that prehistoric sharks had bones as well as cartilage, but did away with the bones to become lighter, faster and nimbler cartilage-only creatures.

This contradicts a long-held view that sharks' lineage never involved bone – a relatively simple line of development, as cartilage is viewed as preceding bone in evolutionary terms.

Long located the fossil 10 years ago but only recently wrote about it, in a report published in the scientific journal *PLOS ONE*.

It was found in the Gogo Formation, once a marine reef but where limestone has preserved skeletons in 3D rather than flattened, journals.plos.org ■



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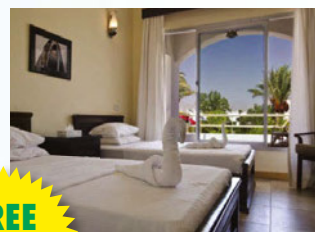
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Navy gets Jutland picture

SHIPS DESTROYED in the Battle of Jutland 99 years ago have been scanned and recorded for the first time, with 3D images created by the Royal Navy survey ship HMS Echo.

Ahead of the battle's centenary next spring, a key part of the Royal Navy's Great War commemorations, HMS Echo spent a week passing over the North Sea area where the great battle's victims lie, scanning with her state-of-the-art sonar suite.

Of 250 warships that squared up at the end of May 1916, 25 ships were sunk. The British suffered the heaviest casualties, with 14 ships lost to Germany's 11 and some three-quarters of the 8500 sailors who died.

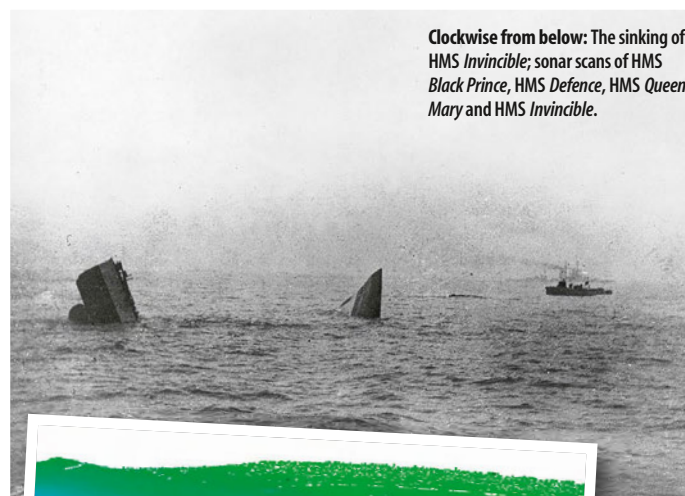
More than 1000 of the British died when the battle-cruiser HMS *Invincible* blew up after a shell penetrated a gun turret and started a fire that detonated her magazine.

Some of HMS Echo's images show the twisted remains of the wreck, testament to the violence of the end.

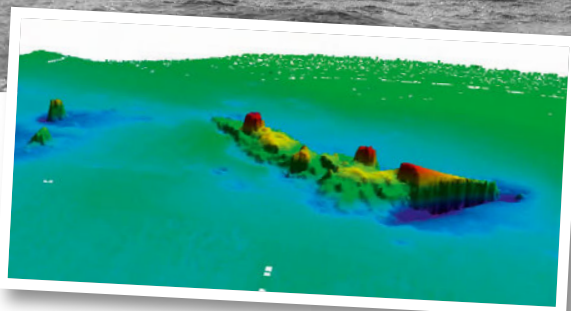
Others among nine ships positively identified were the *Defence*, its bow separate from the rest of its hull, the inverted *Black Prince* and *Queen Mary*, which suffered the same fate as *Invincible*.

In all, HMS Echo managed to cover 21 of the 25 wreck-sites, based on positions provided by eyewitness accounts, charting records and exploratory expeditions.

"The condition of the wrecks varies



Clockwise from below: The sinking of HMS *Invincible*; sonar scans of HMS *Black Prince*, HMS *Defence*, HMS *Queen Mary* and HMS *Invincible*.



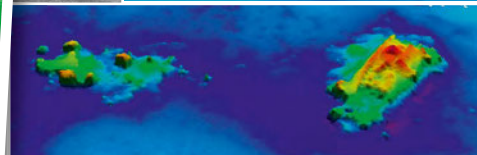
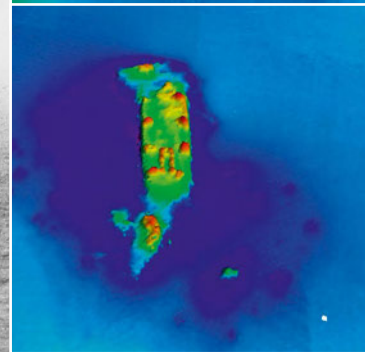
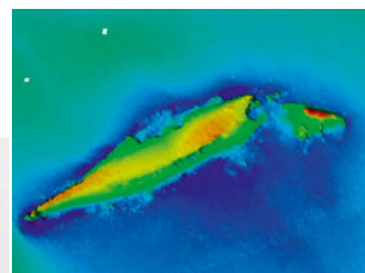
enormously. Some have suffered badly from post-war attempts to salvage them, but others are astonishingly intact," said Nick Hewitt, a historian at the National Museum of the Royal Navy who was on board HMS Echo for the survey.

"HMS *Defence* in particular was 'reduced to atoms' according to one contemporary account, but the wreck was complete, upright and immediately recognisable by the distinctive profile of her secondary

armament, still trained outboard towards her foes a century after the battle."

At the end of the wrecks survey, the 40-strong company of HMS Echo held a service of remembrance and cast a wreath onto the North Sea in memory of the British and German dead.

"The week has been a poignant reminder of the sacrifices the Royal Navy made in protecting our nation during World War 1," said Cdr Phillip Newell, Commanding Officer of Echo.



"The loss of nearly 10,000 sailors over two days seems unbelievable today, and I'm very humbled to have surveyed the wrecks of both British and German warships where so many men lost their lives."

Maritime charts published by the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton will be updated based on the data gathered.

A documentary, using footage gathered by a team from True North Productions, will be aired during next year's centenary commemorations. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Great white action

Legislators in Massachusetts, USA have tightened control of companies engaged in baited great white shark cage-diving operations. In recent years the number of operators has increased and there is concern that excessive baiting activity could encourage sharks to associate humans with food, increasing the risk of attacks on swimmers.

The state's Division of Fisheries has brought in a permit system that specifies how and where such operations can run. A similar measure was introduced in California last year. ■

Aqua Lung lawsuit

Diving equipment manufacturer Aqua Lung faces a legal action in the USA alleging that some of its computer software can malfunction and give incorrect information, posing a risk to users.

The lawsuit, which seeks class status, is claiming some \$5 million in damages plus court costs. "If the dive computer continues to malfunction with a new battery [the first step taken by Aqua Lung when presented with a faulty unit], and it is still under warranty, the dive computer is replaced with a new dive computer because the defective software/hardware cannot be repaired," states the suit. It was filed by Ralph Huntzinger on 21 May in the US District Court for the Southern District of California. ■

MCS beach clean

The Marine Conservation Society runs its annual Great British Beach Clean from 18-21 September and is looking for volunteers to help clear swathes of British coastline. It hopes to equal or exceed last year's turn-out, when more than 5000 volunteers cleaned 301 beaches and cleared about 2500 pieces of litter.

Most will be clearing shorelines, so any divers willing to go below the surface will be welcomed. MCS: 01989 566017, www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch ■

Tekkies to Belgium

The third biennial tekDIVE15 show takes place in Antwerp, Belgium over the 14/15 November weekend. "Visited by more than 600 tek divers" it is "one of the biggest events [for technical divers] in Europe", says its organiser. Exhibitors include "all the major manufacturers of rebreathers and technical-diving equipment".

Speakers from 10 countries will cover wreck- and cave-diving and medical issues, www.tekdive-europe.com ■

Conservation grants

The charity SeaChangers, which raises money in aid of UK-based marine-conservation organisations, has published

its latest round of grants. Sums ranging from £500 to £650 have gone to Weymouth & Portland SAC, Sea Watch Foundation, Blue Ocean Planet, Surfers Against Sewage, Black Fish and Fin Fighters, www.sea-changers.org ■

Sea Shepherd to pay

Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has agreed to pay just over US \$2.5m to two Japanese concerns, after it was judged to have been in contempt late last year of a temporary injunction requiring its ships to remain at least 500 yards away from Japanese whalers in the Southern Ocean.

Japan's Institute for Cetacean Research and Kyodo Senpaku, which collects, processes and sells whale by-products on behalf of the institute, have dropped their action for more than \$4 million in damages in relation to clashes between their and Sea Shepherd's vessels. ■



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Archaeologist Martin Dean dies

MARTIN DEAN, 71, for many years a leading figure in marine archaeology and remote surveying, has died.

Through his career, Dean moved between being one of the finest exponents of classic marine archaeology to being in the forefront of sonar imaging development.

His contributions to conventional marine archaeology included writing *Guidelines on Acceptable Standards in Underwater Archaeology* and co-editing the first edition of *Guide to Principles and Practice* for the Nautical Archaeology Society, of which he was a trustee and active projects participant. Dean has for many years been **DIVER's** Archaeology consultant.

After working as a curator at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, Dean moved to the University of St Andrews and oversaw as Director the development of the university's Archaeological Diving Unit (ADU) into a leading provider of commercial survey and heritage management services.

From its formation in 1986 until 2002, the ADU acted as the British Government's contracted assessor of historic wrecks sites.

While the use of divers was often a desirable option, there were not always the logistical circumstances or sea conditions for deploying them



and the impetus for improved remote sensing was high.

Dean became increasingly interested in the development of multibeam sonar imaging and, in 2001, a survey of war wrecks in Scapa Flow using such a system aboard

the ADU's survey vessel produced impressive results and put the technology on the map among divers and marine archaeologists.

In 2004, Dean and colleagues launched Advanced Underwater Surveys (ADUS) at the University of St Andrews and others came on board to help develop the system's 3D and wreck detailing abilities.

In 2008 Dean and two others, Mark Lawrence and Chris Rowland, set up Advanced Underwater Surveys Ltd to run the ADUS's commercial contracts. The company became ADUS DeepOcean Ltd in 2013, when the DeepOcean Group took a 50% share.

That year, Dean was diagnosed with bile-duct cancer but continued to work as Special Projects Consultant at ADUS DeepOcean.

Despite his difficulties, in May 2014 he completed the tough 81-mile Etape Caledonia charity bicycle ride in Perthshire, in aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care.

He is survived by his wife Judy, son Jonathan and grandson Lucas. ■

Death follows lake incident

AN INQUEST HAS opened into the death of a diver who got into difficulty in a North Yorkshire lake.

Tony Adams, 58, from Norton, died at James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough at the end of May, a week after the incident, which occurred at Ellerton Park, Scorton, near Richmond.

Diving in a group from SAA branch Atlantis449 in Billingham, Adams was reported to have got caught up in ropes and was taken to hospital after being recovered from the lake by his fellow-divers, who performed emergency first aid before paramedics arrived.

The inquest was adjourned in early

June by Acting Senior Coroner Clare Bailey at Teesside Coroner's Court.

★ **A diver's body found off the Dorset coast on 19 June was, as DIVER went to press, believed to be that of Andy Moll, 56, from Taunton in Somerset, who went missing while club-diving a month earlier.**

Moll disappeared while on an outing from Swanage with fellow members of Bristol's Severnside Sub-Aqua Club (News, July) to dive the Kyarra and Aparima wrecks.

The remains were found on the wreck on which Moll had been diving (see Monty Halls column). ■

SOLVED, ANOTHER NON-PROBLEM

Let's be honest, scuba diving really isn't difficult. You strap on the kit, remember to breathe and away you go. That, however, doesn't stop people trying to endlessly reinvent the wheel and make it simpler or easier or more fun, all in ways that achieve exactly the opposite.

Take 23-year-old Australian Edric Verbeek-Martin's idea for a small floating compressor attached to 6m of hose and a full-face diving mask, a system he calls the Freedive.

In the first place, surface supply is nothing new. In

the second place, similar small-scale individual set-ups have been sold from time to time and, third, how exactly does swimming around trailing what is effectively a large SMB at the end of 6m of breathing hose make your dives anything but more complicated and harder work?

Still, he's in the final of some design award competition, so it must be better than it sounds. All he needs is a financial backer for the shallow-water sites of the world to be packed with a whole tangle of people who had never before considered scuba.

Bond sub let-down

Dum-di-dum-dum, dum-dum, da-DAH, da-da-dah. That's the Bond theme, if you want to hum along.

Elon Musk, CEO of the Tesla car company, is a bit of a Bond nut. After he paid almost a million bucks to buy the Lotus Esprit that transformed into a submarine in *The Spy Who Loved Me* and then found out that it was just a movie prop and didn't work, he was a bit disappointed. Miffed, even.

So he has decided to install a Tesla power-plant and see if it can be made to do the things it was meant to do.

I wouldn't bet against him. His company produces the Tesla P85D, a four-seat saloon capable of 0-60mph in just three seconds, but only if you select the appropriately named "Insane" mode.

Just imagine, not only will you be first to the dive-site, but you won't need to stop at the water's edge. That's a proper Insane mode!

Six-minute Cruise

You may remember the piece from a few months ago about Tom Cruise signing up for an everyday PADI scuba course in preparation for the latest *Mission: Impossible* movie.

Well, the movie is underway and our Tom has been putting his new-found skills to some righteous use in a scene

that required him to hold his breath for six minutes.

Six minutes? That is one seriously talented dude. If you want to find out what it feels like, try breath-holding for the duration of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and then tell me all about it.

Yellow brick road

In the *Wizard of Oz* movie Judy Garland wore a pair of ruby slippers, as we all remember. Actually, five pairs were used for filming, and each pair is estimated to be worth \$2 million.

Ten years ago a thief stole one pair and a strong local rumour suggests, for reasons not entirely clear, that they were then dumped in the Tioga Mine Pit lake in Minnesota, sealed inside a watertight container.

So, a pair of \$2-million shoes at the bottom of a lake, but in a container that means they'll be in good shape if they're ever recovered.

Time to don the aqualung and get looking, methinks. And indeed a team recently announced that they would try to recover the shoes, timing the event to coincide with a *Wizard of Oz* festival at the nearby town of Grand Rapids, where Garland was born. They scheduled four dives over two days.

However, the 70m-deep lake covers six hectares and, surprisingly, they didn't find the shoes. Still, lads, keep

going, all it takes is brains, heart and courage, and with a click of your heels you'll be back in Kansas by teatime.

Gun is the grabber

Dive group Scuba Republic from Roxton, Cambridgeshire, recently spent a day cleaning up the river beside a bridge in St Neots. The divers recovered an impressive haul of dumped metalware that included the inevitable supermarket trolleys, bikes and a pushchair.

So did the media highlight the value of the clean-up and praise the group for their public-spirited work?

Nope. The headline was *Gun Found In River*. Read the article and you find that the divers weren't sure if it was real or a replica, but they called the police to take it away, which they did, so it was all a non-story.

Still, I expect *Gun In River* attracts more readers than *Scuba Divers Do Good Thing*.

Georgia in mind

In the USA military divers are clearing the wreck of the CSS *Georgia*, an ironclad gunboat built for use by the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Found too heavy to move against the currents despite her steam engine, she ended up being used as a floating battery before being scuttled by her own crew. Now the munitions are being removed and the wreck will

be lifted as part of a plan to expand the nearby harbour at Savannah.

Senior Chief Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician Richard Bledsoe says it'll be tough because there are vicious currents and nil vis.

Yeah, sure, but I think most wreck-divers would have leapt at the chance to join a project like that.

Diving means PADI

At holiday time the old stories resurface. Thomson operates weekly flights from Gatwick to Sharm, and presumably other diving destinations, and gives an extra 5kg of checked baggage allowance if you show proof of your status as a diver.

Which is nice of it, though Monarch does the same and allows 10kg of hand luggage, which is much nicer.

Anyway, back to Thomson at Gatwick, where you arrive at the front of the queue, find your bag weighs 23kg and produce your BSAC blue book to claim the extra 5kg.


At which point the check-in man goes blank and says he needs to see your PADI card. Apparently PADI is the only agency that produces qualified divers, or the only one he has heard of, at any rate.

My informant had no PADI qualification, though eventually fanning out a fistful of TDI, PSAI and IANTD cards opened a breach in the defences, and the extra allowance was grudgingly granted.

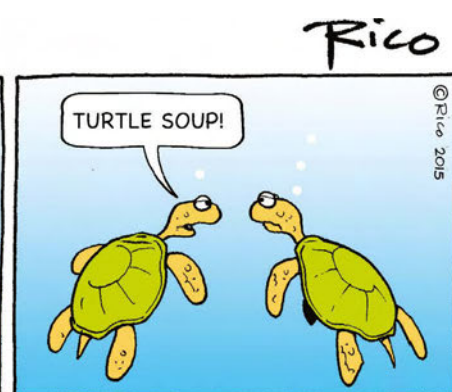
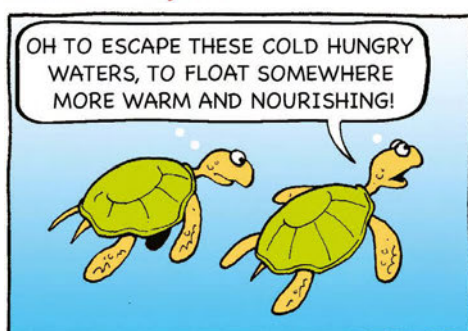
Welcome balance

Normally, post diving-death accident reports home in on the terrifying risks that allegedly accompany even the most casual of shallow-water dives, but not this time.

The journo writing up the piece, Kevin Lollar, checked his facts with DAN and presented a balanced, well-written account that focused on the relatively low risks in scuba-diving.

One of the stats he used is that the fatal accident rate for scuba-divers is 163 per million, and for joggers 130 per million. Well done, Mr Lollar. 

Sea People



Rico

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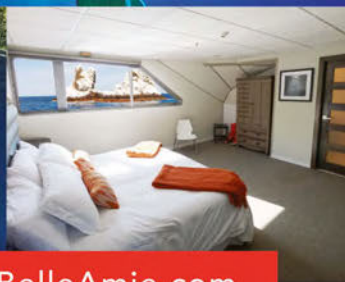
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MY SHARK WEEK



The Bahamas is one of best places in the world for wild shark

encounters. But as **LISA COLLINS** discovers when she dives with four different outfits, shark encounters can come in many forms – and some are wilder than others

“**C**AN YOU GO TO THE Bahamas for a week in a fortnight’s time?” asked Jane from Sportif Dive. “I need to go check out some hotels but can’t make it – would you be able to go instead? By the way, there is the possibility of doing some shark dives.”

First thought: of course I can go, there’s nothing in the diary I can’t change.

Second thought: I had surgery on my wrist two weeks before and will still be in a cast.

I took advice from friends, and ended up with a water-resistant cast cover sleeve from Hammond Drysuits. I could fill it with fresh water (I wasn’t allowed to get sea water, with all its micro-organisms and parasites, on the incision site) to eliminate the risk of pressure build-up at depth, as there would be no air in the sleeve.

It would be difficult, but manageable. I was very interested to find out how the dive centres would react – as well as the sharks!



Pictured: Miguel Angel Somavilla holds a shark in a state of tonic immobility (TI).

Below: Two sharks fighting over food.



REEF OASIS

IN GRAND BAHAMA I was to dive with Reef Oasis. Italian shark expert Riccardo Avogadri was an early practitioner of shark tonic immobility (TI) there.

TI is an unlearned reflex characterised by a state of immobility and torpor, induced by grasping the first dorsal fin with one hand and the body immediately behind the anal fin with the other, inverting the shark and holding it as rigid as possible – although now it also seems possible to put a shark into a TI state by holding its snout and dorsal fin.

It seems that covering the ampullae of Lorenzini receptors in the snout interrupts the electrical impulses. Sharks normally enter a TI state within a minute and can stay this way for up to 15 minutes before righting themselves and swimming away.

Miguel Angel Somavilla would be our shark expert. He asked us to carry our kit to where the dual-hulled dive-boat awaited in the shallows off the beach.

Helping me with my gear, and thoughtfully giving me the end nearest the entry platform, one of Miguel's two safety divers even insisted on setting up my equipment for me.

A 10-minute boat-ride brought us to Shark Junction. We had been briefed to form a line, kneeling on the sandy bottom at 14m with our backs to a small overturned boat wreck. Visibility was quite good, at around 20m.

I jumped in and was handed my camera – normally I dive with a big DSLR, but with only one hand free I needed to use a much smaller rig.

As I descended I could see six large Caribbean grey reef sharks circling below. The safety divers positioned us at arm's width from each other before Miguel, clad in full chainmail, descended with the small cylindrical bait-box containing fish-guts and pieces.

Miguel had told us to turn off our strobes until he was settled and the sharks had calmed down. Electrical impulses emanating from flashguns are known to



Above: Miguel with a shark in TI.

excite sharks' senses. He positioned himself about 5m in front of us and the sharks swarmed around, bashing into him and the container as they tried to get at the fish.

We had been given 5mm full suits and told that this was mainly for protection in case the sharks took an exploratory bite, although in the cool 23° water we were happy to have them.

The suits were all-black, because bright colours can excite the sharks. We had also been given black gloves and told that with them on we could "stroke" the sharks, but only front to back, from dorsal to pectoral fin.

THE ATMOSPHERE WAS TRANQUIL

as Miguel took his time seeking out the calmest shark before gently placing his hand over its snout.

He waited for it to settle on the bottom before gently gripping its dorsal fin and raising it into the water column.

The shark looked totally at peace. Seven or eight other large sharks (they are

obviously well fed), swam around Miguel and the passive shark. Keeping a 3m distance from us, Miguel moved slowly along the line so that we could observe the shark more closely and take photographs.

Beatriz, a fellow lady diver, reached out and hesitantly stroked a shark, while others buzzed over our heads, giving Simon, whose first sighting of sharks under water this was, a bit of a fright.

Once back in the centre he attempted to lift the shark on one hand into a vertical position. He managed this for a few seconds only, and the shark seemed to come out of its trance and swim quickly away.

It didn't seem too happy and was a little agitated, as if it wasn't sure what had happened, but it was soon back to collect its fishy reward from the bait-box.

Miguel then attempted to "hypnotise" a large female, which had a fish-hook and line with weights trailing from her mouth. It had clearly caused an infection, and Miguel wanted to cut the hook off, but the shark wasn't playing ball.

Below left: Beatriz stroking a shark with a gloved hand.

Right: A shark buzzing Simon.



UNEXSO

THE FOLLOWING DAY we had three dives booked with the largest dive centre on Grand Bahama, UNEXSO. The last dive of the day was to be at Shark Junction again, but this one was advertised as a shark feed.

Again, the dive-staff were extremely helpful and sensitive about my bad arm. The boat was docked in the marina next to UNEXSO's massive dive-centre and retail shop, and seven other divers boarded, so it was only half-full. The other divers were fairly inexperienced, macho Americans who clearly wanted to feel the adrenalin rush of danger.

In stark contrast to the cautious approach at Reef Oasis, here we were given wetsuits with brightly coloured stripes, and even brighter yellow fins.

Shark-feeder Stephen delivered a detailed and humorous briefing. He told us that he too would attempt to "hypnotise" the sharks, but unlike Miguel told us we didn't need gloves and could stroke the sharks anywhere and in any direction. He also said he would bring the sharks very close to us.

Cheering and high-fiveing, the Americans were very happy!

WE DESCENDED INTO shark soup – there were a lot more animals than on the previous day, 15 to 18 – which made me wonder whether a little chumming had been going on during our briefing.

Several huge Nassau grouper and lots of jack and snapper were also present.

Unfortunately, my mask had been damaged after my previous dive when dive-staff had thrown it into a corner and chucked weight-belts on top of it. I realised this only when I jumped in, because it flooded almost immediately.

I was handed another mask from the boat and started my descent. This actually worked out well, because I was the last to be positioned and was put at the end away from the Americans.

The loudest and brashiest was having problems with his buoyancy and being helped to dump all his air. Stephen had told everyone not to wave hands around or stick them out in front, but as soon as the man's buoyancy was sorted he started pointing towards the sharks and sticking his GoPro out towards them. He continued to do this throughout the dive!

Stephen positioned himself just 3m in front of the line of divers. Things seemed much more frenetic – sharks were everywhere. Stephen came closer still to us, passing along the line an arm's length away and handing out fish-pieces to the sharks. Bashing into us, the sharks fought to be nearest to him. Seeing a shark's mouth heading straight towards you the eyes hooded over in anticipation of

food was quite disconcerting!

Now I have dived with many sharks in both natural encounters and on shark feeds, and have never felt as uncomfortable as I did on that dive.

I knew I could always use my camera to push a shark away if necessary, but I was concerned that inexperienced divers were being involved in this sort of practice.

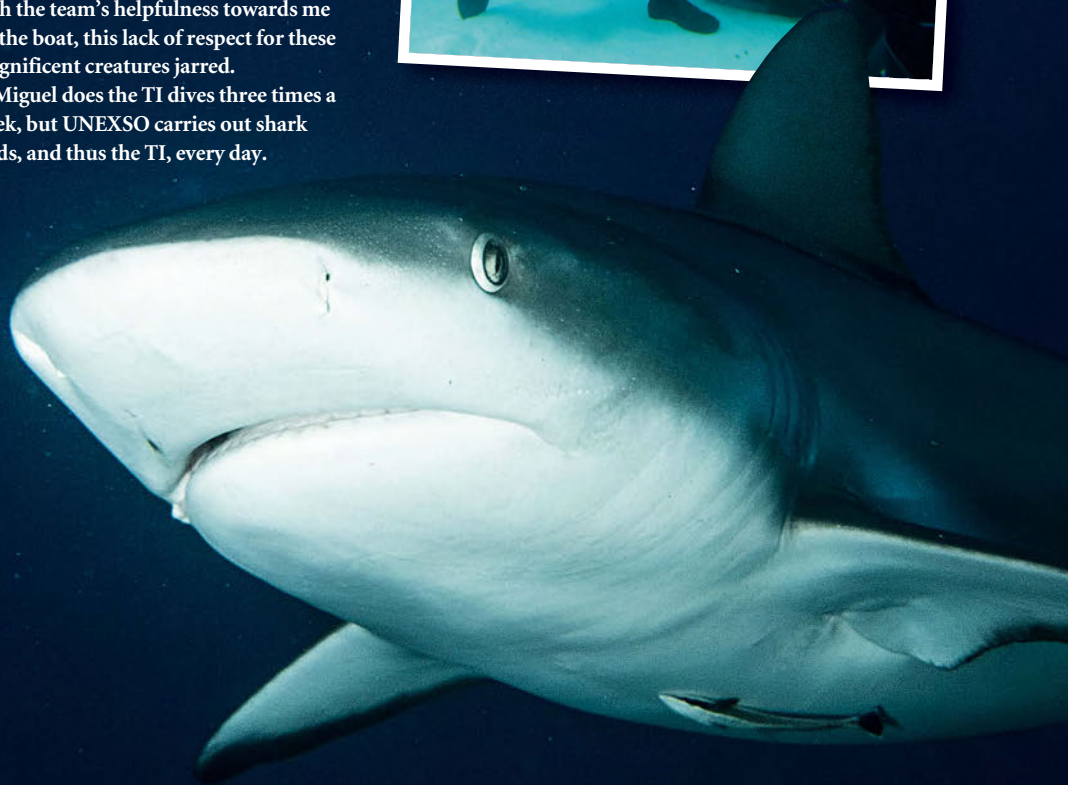
Stephen then "wrangled" a shark into a state of tonic immobility. In contrast to the serene and respectful actions of Miguel the previous day, he would grab a snout and push it down onto the sand and hold the shark there until it calmed, at the same time kicking out at the grouper trying to reach the bait-box.

He then brought the shark around and waited while the Americans all gave it lots of strokes and prods, posing for each other's videos. After feeling so happy with the team's helpfulness towards me on the boat, this lack of respect for these magnificent creatures jarred.

Miguel does the TI dives three times a week, but UNEXSO carries out shark feeds, and thus the TI, every day.



Pictured: Stephen with a shark in TI – too close for comfort.



STUART COVE'S

NEXT ON THE ITINERARY was a visit to Nassau to dive with the world-famous Stuart Cove's. I had dived there eight years before with my then-16-year-old daughter Megan and had found it extremely professional, taking the safety of the participants very seriously.

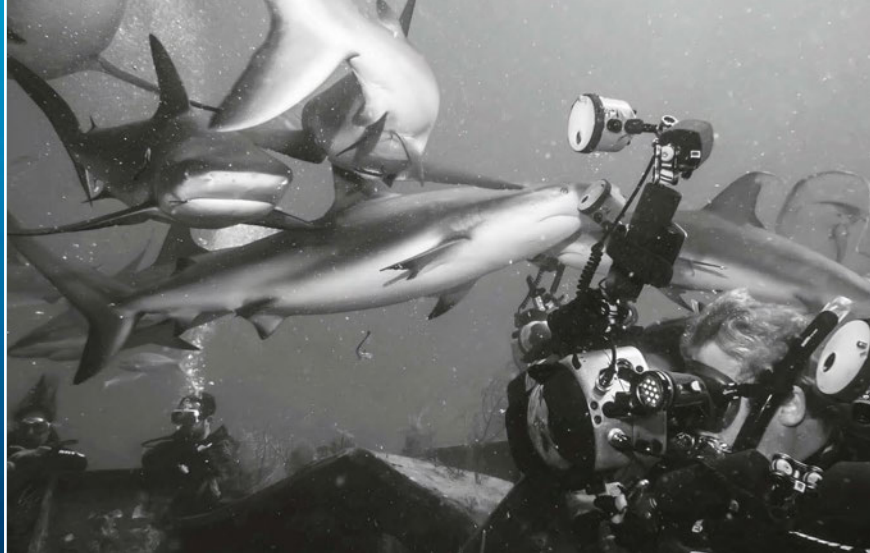
Stuart Cove's has four massive boats that each take 30 divers and are geared up for the multitude of cruise passengers who visit the islands daily. It also has six smaller dive-boats for private tours.

We were assigned our own boat and crew. Not only did we have a boat captain, shark-feeder, safety-diver and

videographer on board but also a deck-hand to help us with our gear. Setting up mine, he assured me that he would help me as much as he could, and he really did. He even insisted on doing up all the clasps and buckles on my BC!

The crew were exceedingly friendly. They asked where we would like to dive and whether we wanted to take the bait-box down and hide it on the dive-site so that it would attract sharks without it being a feed as such.

We were given many reef and wreck options, but settled on a tanker called *Sea Trader*. Despite being sunk less than a



year ago, there were signs of coral growth. We followed the bowline to the top of the deck at 16m, then went over the side to the sandy bottom at 22m to inspect the propeller.

Our shark-feeder had gone ahead to hide the bait-box inside a hatchway protected by a galleried area in the stern.

We swam to the stern and watched as fat Caribbean grey reef sharks materialised from the blue from every direction.

Hanging next to the rail watching as the sharks swam through the gallery looking for food, we were careful not to make them feel trapped, spacing ourselves apart to allow them plenty of room to exit.

Moving away from the stern, I explored the tanker, aware of curious sharks following me. Finding a "No Smoking" sign, I signalled for another diver to pose for me. The wheelhouse looked eerily as if it had just been abandoned, with charts and notices still pinned to the walls.

Soon depleted air and deco time forced our ascent up the line. The sharks still circling around and below us made for a very interesting safety stop.

OUR NEXT DIVE WAS on a shallower reef. Again our feeder hid the box, and we watched as a few sharks became curious, but it was not as exhilarating as the first dive.

Ours was the only boat moored at each of the dive-sites we visited. Stuart Cove's has plenty where sharks can be seen, so the boats communicate with each other to make sure that this is the case.

The next day we dived on a smaller, shallower wreck, the *Ray of Hope*, where the bait-box was hidden again. Many more sharks than on the previous day's dives swarmed around us as we explored the picturesque wreck, which we liked so much that we returned for a second dive.

Shark-feeder Terri briefed us to position ourselves on the outside rail around the bow. She would then descend, in full chain-mail, to sit on the deck and entice the sharks.

Aware that something different was happening the sharks darted excitedly all around us, buzzing over our heads and

barging through the arm's-width space between us. Feeling more protected as most of my body hung down over the side of the hull, with only my arms and head exposed, I felt quite comfortable.

I hooked my bad arm through the rail and balanced my camera on the rail itself.

A sudden frenzy ensued as Terri speared a fish-head with her long steel pole and held it out to a shark which, its eyes hooded over, took it quite delicately.

Other sharks tried to push it out of the way to get to the food first, but without luck. The sharks seemed almost completely oblivious of their observers, checking us out only occasionally.

Although fairly frenzied, the whole dive felt completely safe and controlled, even when Terri brought a fish-head out right in front of my camera so that I could try for the "money shot" of a shark bite.

She surfaced first, taking the bait-box and sharks with her, and we waited five minutes before ascending.

At only 14m we had plenty of air left after a high-adrenaline but very safe 35-minute shark feed.

After lunch we headed back out for a third dive. I felt I had pushed my wrist as far as it would go that day, especially as a shark's tail had given it a bit of a whack,

Above left: Shark by the *Sea Trader*.

Right: Up close and personal on the *Ray of Hope*.

so I elected to stay on the boat with a couple of others in the group.

Diving a similar wreck close to the *Ray of Hope*, the other divers reported on a similar dive to our first that day, with great visibility and many sharks.

Stuart Cove's bright pink courtesy bus dropped us off at our hotel, a 40-minute drive away in downtown Nassau. Being the only dive centre in that remote part of the island has many advantages, however,

A SUDDEN FRENZY ENSUED AS TERRI SPEARED A FISH-HEAD WITH HER LONG STEEL POLE

the shark dives being the best!

Bimini, our next destination, was the one I had looked forward to the most. The great hammerhead dive there was the one that had made me want to find a way to dive with a cast on. Even the thought of the 5.30am pick-up for the half-hour flight didn't dim my excitement.

I have been lucky enough to dive with scalloped hammerheads in Hawaii and the Galapagos and seen glimpses of great hammerheads in San Salvador and the Maldives, but I had wanted to do a close-encounter dive with them for a long time.

Below: The 'money shot' – a shark takes a fish head from Terri.



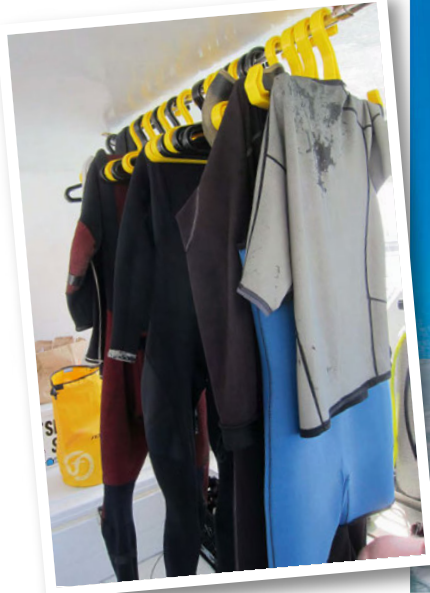
NEIL WATSON'S

ARRIVING EARLY IN THE MORNING, we were driven to Bimini Sands Hotel, where Neil Watson's dive centre was located. We were to check in first and prep our cameras before diving two hours later.

Unfortunately it took nearly 90 minutes for the surly and unhelpful staff to check us in.

Rushing to get our cameras prepped before the boat left, I neglected to re-check that the camera was seated properly in the housing. I had put it together the night before and checked that everything was working before I packed it, but it must have got jarred during the flight, and the lens was slightly out of alignment.

Practically running to the boat with five minutes to spare, I was surprised not to be met by any dive-staff or helped on



Above left: A mishmash of dive gear at Neil Watson's.

Right: Great hammerhead in Bimini.



MICHAEL KRUEGER

board by a deck-hand. They were all huddled together on the top deck, and remained that way for most of the trip.

None of us had brought dive-gear except for masks and fins as we had been told that a 15kg baggage allowance was imposed on the inter-island flights. At every other dive-centre we had been able to rent virtually new and branded gear.

Neil turned up and complained that we didn't have gear. Although he had been previously informed that this would be the case, he told us he didn't have enough for the 11 divers aboard and that we would have to split the dive into two shorter dives and share.

Eventually, however, gear seemed to materialise and suddenly there was enough for us all, though little of it seemed to be in good condition.

One wetsuit had a huge chunk missing from the backside, as if a shark had taken a bite of a tasty rump. Several BCs were either too large or too small. One diver had to be virtually shoe-horned into a too-tight wetsuit.

My regulator was freeflowing and leaking from the first stage. The amount of air in the tanks also varied – I had only 110 bar. I queried this and the leaks with Neil and was told not to worry – I would be fine! Well, he was the instigator of the great-hammerhead dives in Bimini, so I trusted his judgment and looked forward to the dive.

At the site, a 15-minute ride out, shark-feeder Brad, a very macho Forces type of guy, gave an extremely serious and thorough briefing.

He told us that we needed to be no more than an arm's width apart, in a straight line, with him in the centre of the line. He would position us cross-current, and gave us white plastic sticks made from plumber's pipe to hold out towards the sharks in case they came too close.

These would be placed in the sand, where we would be instructed to kneel.

BRAD ALSO TOLD US THAT the sharks would patrol only in front of us, not behind. One safety-diver would be stationed behind us. We were to follow an anchorline to the sandy bottom at 9m, then swim across for the safety-diver to position us.

Relying on my fellow-divers to help me, as I had no help from the staff, I eventually jumped into the sea and headed down to where most of the others were already situated.

Visibility was very bad at around 8m because a storm the previous day had disturbed the fine sand, and the manoeuvring of the divers hadn't helped.

I tried a test shot, only to find that my camera wasn't working.

The safety-diver positioned me next to a very short white stick and beside Brad. The diver on my other side was signalling

that he didn't have a white stick, and he wasn't the only one.

Brad started dropping chunks of fish into the water in front of him and a huge hammerhead appeared out of the murky water. Swinging its hammer from side to side, it grabbed at the fish, turning away from me at the last moment.

Nurse sharks were pushing towards Brad, trying to get a piece of the action, and while his attention was drawn away, the hammerhead circled and came straight at me. I extended my stick – it seemed to ignore it but then, only a metre from me, turned away.

Repositioning myself in the slight side-current, which made it difficult to stay upright, I prepared for the next pass.

Another large piece of fish was dropped into the water column in front of Brad. The shark approached from his other side and grabbed the fish just before reaching me.

On the next pass, Brad didn't release a fish. This time the shark kept coming until its huge hammer filled my whole field of view. I pushed out with the stick, but it paid no attention. Holding up my camera I pushed that out towards it too, but still it kept coming.

All I could focus on was its mouthful of teeth, looking almost too small for its head but still a fair size. It touched my camera and stick and pushed on towards me. With the stick in my bad hand, it

Below: No dive staff in sight at Neil Watson's.

Below right: A mouthful of teeth.



was virtually useless. I pushed hard with my camera against the side of its head and it tried to take my strobe in its mouth.

I was leaning further and further back, almost lying flat, when Brad grabbed its hammer in both hands and pushed its head away from me with all his might.

THE SHARK TURNED SLIGHTLY, then came at me again. Again, Brad pushed it away and it finally got the message. Its body language seemed to indicate tension and it approached from different angles, as well as from behind and between us.

Beatriz didn't have a stick, and as the shark approached she fell flat on the sand as it virtually pushed her over.

After 15 minutes I checked my air to find I was down to 20 bar! We had been told to let the safety-diver know if we were low but I hadn't seen him throughout the dive and couldn't now.

I tapped Brad and signalled that I was going up. Waiting for the shark to be in front of the group I swam across to the line and ascended, thinking how much I had disliked having to physically interact with the shark and how unsafe I had found the dive generally.

I have great respect for sharks and hope I treat them with the respect they deserve,

Right: Lying down to avoid a great hammerhead.

Below: Lisa's cast at the end of the trip.



MICHAEL KRUEGER

but this dive left me feeling uneasy. I don't blame the shark for the closeness of the encounter – it was acting as it would naturally with food about.

I do blame the way in which the dive was conducted for making it act that way.



There had been the possibility of diving with tiger sharks at Tiger Beach in Grand Bahama, but because of an "incident" the previous week, all diving there had been stopped.

Which only reinforces that these are wild apex predators, and sometimes I feel that dive centres that conduct these dives day in, day out can become that bit too blasé about them.

★ Reef Oasis Dive Club, Grand Bahama, reefoasisdiveclub.com

★ UNEXSO, Grand Bahama, www.unexso.com

★ Stuart Cove's Nassau Bahamas Dive Adventures, New Providence, www.stuartcove.com

★ Neil Watson's Bimini Scuba Centre, Bimini, www.biminiscubacenter.com

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Some divers simply don't do night dives, and others aren't too sure about them. **RICHARD ASPINALL** suggests that those who usually opt for an early dinner step out of their comfort zone and embrace the darkness

NIGHT-DIVING IS ONE of those things some divers just don't do. It can be a little spooky, it's true, and does incur slightly more risk than daytime diving. Feeling uncomfortable with the notion is nothing to be embarrassed about, because a bad experience on an unsuitable site or when insufficiently trained might have put you off in the past, or perhaps you just can't put your finger on the reason for your reluctance.

It's also true that it's always best to miss a dive if we don't feel comfortable with it, rather than create risk.

All that said, pushing ourselves every once in a while can be thrilling, and that's where a little advance knowledge and training makes the difference.

Altered perception

On a night dive you see only the little bit of the world illuminated by your torch and perhaps the lights from your boat or the moon, which is perhaps why it can be off-putting to some.

There is less information available to us, and we are very much visual creatures. The grand vistas of corals, the massive steel architecture; all is replaced with a disc of light a few metres wide.

This does not have to be a bad thing, however, if you keep in mind that all that has changed is time and your perception. With the bigger picture in your mind, relax and go with it.

Wrecks, reefs and even sunken vehicles have a greater presence, shadows are deeper and your gaze is no longer focused on the whole.

Before you know it, you're seeing so much more concentrated detail than you did on the day dive. It doesn't have to be a loss of information, simply different information. Moving slowly and working up a mental map can really help.

Take the *Thistleworm* wreck – a popular dive, day or night, though at night finning down the companionways and exploring the interior with your torch, picking over each detail that you missed in the day, feels far more like exploring. Suddenly the bikes or the shells have so much more immediacy.

During the day you're admiring the batfish swimming across the

Pictured: Diver and scorpionfish at night – a time to be especially vigilant about where you put your hands!

DO YOU DIVE BY NIGHT?

superstructure and trying to get a shot of your buddy next to one of the guns, but at night your torch beam is finding hidden crevices, lighting up fish-filled cabins and the descent into the holds is even more atmospheric.

It's the same ship, but you are experiencing it very differently.

The night shift

During the night, the bulk of the fish are tucked up in crevices and coral heads, and the reefs belong to an army of critters busy getting on with their lives while the rest of the reef snoozes.

Daytime's anthias, parrotfish and butterflyfish are keeping their heads down and trying to avoid predators.

Out on the reef, the basketstars and featherstars are catching passing plankton and the nudibranchs in their bewildering colours are scattered across the reef.

A concentration of torch beams and a red glow will indicate that someone has found a Spanish dancer, and under deck-plates and in coral rubble hermit crabs, lobsters and shrimps will be spotted staring at you before scuttling away.

Of course, some fish-life will be making the most of your lights: the lionfish, for example, loved and hated in equal measure (depending in which ocean you are) may well have learnt to catch their now-startled prey with the help of your torch-beams. I don't help them, and I don't think we should, but that's another matter.

Dive torches are now available that emit light entirely at the red end of the spectrum. Fish and other life-forms can't perceive it; great for observing creatures at night without disturbing them.

Other lights that emit a very blue light can bring out the fluorescent pigments in fish, corals and inverts and add a new dimension to the dive.

One step further is the use of specialist ultra-violet lights – fluo-diving can illuminate patches of reef to create a magical otherworldly experience.

For many, the night shift is the main reason for night-diving. An otherwise mundane wreck or reef can come alive with life once the sun goes down.

If you're not sure about night-diving, a short and shallow "critter hunt" with a dive-guide or experienced buddy can be a great ice-breaker.

Photography

Night-diving can provide a great way to get some astounding shots with even the simplest of cameras. You can forget backscatter and washed-out reef shots – just set your controls to macro and focus



(literally) on the little stuff. Nudibranchs, shrimps, other critters and corals look great at night, and you can really capture their bright colours and intricate structures.

You may well be tempted to snap away at sleeping fish, turtles and your buddy's increasingly angry face, but be considerate. Not only can flashing fish perhaps be painful to them but it can cause them to break cover, putting them at risk of predation or injury. As ever in diving, be thoughtful and considerate.

Above: There are fewer distractions when critter-hunting at night but good buoyancy control is more important than ever.

Below: Always a popular sighting – a Spanish dancer.

The right site...

Some sites are perfect for night-diving. Small shallow wrecks such as the famous barge at Gubal Island in the Red Sea are easily navigated and avoid extremes of depth.

Walls also make great night dives. You simply fin along the wall, turn round and come back, which limits the chances of getting lost and reduces the work required on navigation, allowing you to concentrate on the sights around you.

... the right kit

Knowing that you're prepared and have the correct kit helps to allay any worries you may have and reassures you that there's one less thing to worry about. A redundant gas supply, two torches (one as a back-up), knife, SMB, emergency strobe and whistle will all help should an emergency arise.

If you get lost, don't feel embarrassed about surfacing and signalling with your torch illuminating your SMB.

Any diver can get disorientated and it's best to surface safely with plenty of gas than get stressed and feel you must return to the boat.

A pick-up by RIB is better than spending the night on oxygen and you'll be surprised how many divers have surfaced on the wrong boat. Don't worry, at least you've come up, and you may well make new friends.

We've all drifted off during a briefing,



IF YOU GET LOST, DON'T FEEL EMBARRASSED ABOUT SURFACING

but if you remember where the shotline is, in which compass direction the wreck or reef faces and how deep certain features are, your mental map of the site will keep you orientated.

When you get back to the shotline and begin your ascent with 50 bar (or more) left in your tank, you'll feel pretty proud of yourself.

Overcoming nerves

Many inland dive-sites offer night-time sessions in unthreatening surroundings. Chances are you'll be diving with friends and perhaps others who are getting their first taste of night-diving, so you won't feel outnumbered.

Dive a site you've dived during the day so you that you're already familiar with it. Apart from feeling more secure, the contrasts between the day and night experiences are interesting in their own right.

Night-diving courses are available, and cover aspects such as avoiding buddy separation, night-diving signals and how to orientate yourself and relocate your entry point.

Don't be embarrassed to ask dive-guides to take you on a short shallow bumble – chances are they'll find loads of good stuff for you to look at that will distract you from any lingering nervousness.

Practise and confirm signals to be used with your buddy.



Above: A dusk dive is a good way to ease into a night-dive – the reverse process at dawn can also be fun.

Right: Wrecks like the *Thistlegorm* can provide a different experience after dark.



Torchwork

Understanding and using night-diving signals is key to ensuring that you and your buddy keep in contact and exchange information as readily as during the day. It's all about clever use of your torch, which becomes a communication device as much as a critter-hunting tool.

- ★ During your pre-dive check, discuss which signals you are likely to use to avoid confusion on the dive.
- ★ Making a circle with your light beam is a question: "Are you OK?" Your buddy will do likewise to signal yes. Making the circle around your buddy's beam is the best way to get their attention. Tank bangers or shakers might help if your buddy is not taking much notice.
- ★ Moving the torch-beam to either side rapidly indicates that you are trying to get your buddy's attention. Some divers use up and down movements to indicate problems, and rapid movements indicate more serious issues.
- ★ Divers who know each other well often adapt and develop signals. Some will "lasso" a buddy's torch-beam with their own before "leading" it towards something of interest.
- ★ Shining your light onto your hands allows you to use hand-signals. You can also shine it onto your contents gauge and computer to show readings to a buddy close by, but make sure you are not shining the light into the buddy's eyes.
- ★ Stay close. Your light-beams should be able to overlap so that you can share information. Show each other what you've found but create the least amount of light disturbance.
- ★ Be prepared to use the torch at the surface to indicate that you are OK and to illuminate yourself or your SMB and if necessary to indicate distress by rapidly waving it.

Above: Lionfish are among the predators that may use divers' lights to help them hunt by night.

Below: Crabs, along with lobsters and shrimps, are among the most notable nocturnal characters.

Consider a dusk dive. Entering the water before the sun goes down can be the perfect halfway-house, and shallow reefs can look fantastically well-lit.

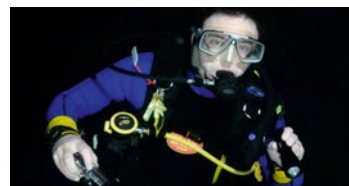
Have a simple dive plan. You don't need to commit to 45-minute, multi-level complicated dives.

Set a sensible goal of 20 minutes exploring a small part of the site and build your confidence as you develop your capability.

Night-dives require patience and a steady approach. With sensible planning and training you will find that you lose your apprehension of night-dives as your confidence grows, and you'll learn that while your caution was well-placed, you can safely avoid the risks, real or imagined, and will have taken one further step in your diving career.

You are now someone who definitely does "do" night dives.

Do's and a don't



DO consider wearing small lights to identify yourself (or ask your buddy to do so). They can be useful, but your fellow-divers might prefer it if you avoid flashing ones.

DO avoid disturbing the local wildlife, which can be easily damaged by careless divers. Take extra care, take it slow and easy and plan your dive to avoid easily damaged life and structures.

DO stay close to the boat. You may well see just as much life under the boat as you will far away from it, and sometimes boat-lights attract that life.

DO have a back-up torch, and consider using a torch with variable output. You will see more underwater life with a light that isn't blasting the reef with hundreds of watts of power.

DO have a plan worked out in case of buddy separation.

DO use a shotline if one is available. Use it to orientate yourself and locate yourself on wrecks before heading off.

DON'T point your torch directly into your buddy's eyes. Learn to use it as a signalling device.



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Some people love monochrome, others regard it purely as a way to salvage failed colour shots. This month **ALEX MUSTARD** shows how underwater black & white photography can step up to competition-winning level

'Don't be afraid of adding lots of contrast to b&w images'

DON'T SEE ENOUGH black and white photos, only grey and grey." That was Kurt Amsler's insight into the state of underwater photography in 2015, told to me when we were judging the CMAS World Championship last month.

Kurt's clipped Swiss-German pronunciation made his comments sound all the more persuasive! I had my mission for this month's column.

Underwater photographers regularly convert their pictures into black and white to rescue shots that have been taken from too far away!

This solution actually does work very well for many problem pictures that are too blue and lack contrast.

Monochrome conversions cut through the haze and allow a massive boost to contrast and clarity, making the subject pop out of the picture again.

However, saving failures rarely, if ever, produces the best black and white images. These require more than software.

Truly great black and white images start with the decisions we make under water about how we are going to compose and use light in the photo we are taking. Black and white photography is all about finding and shooting visually appealing shapes and shadows.

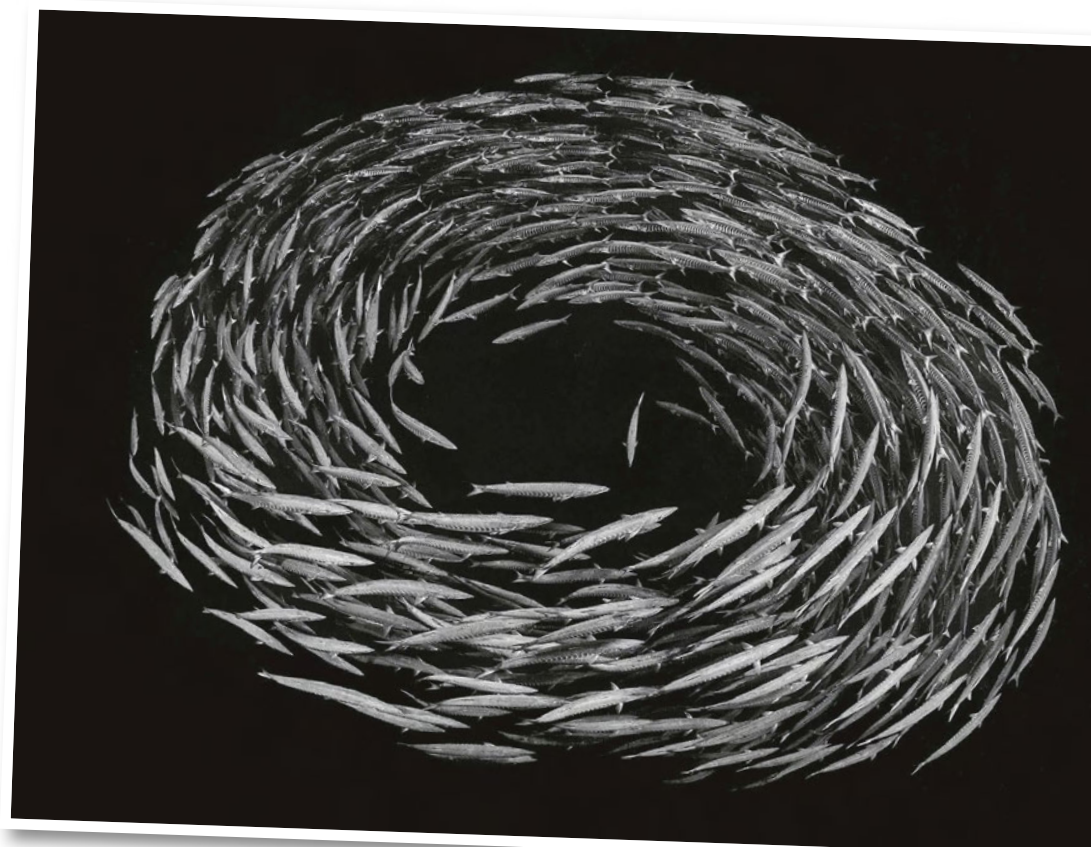
SOME ARGUE THAT black and white photography exists only because of serendipity. If colour film had been invented first, they wonder if black and white images would ever have happened!

Even without this excuse, many underwater photographers never try black and white, instead focusing on capturing the colours of our world.

More still use it only to resurrect shots. I hope this column will persuade you to spend an upcoming dive focused only on monochrome.

Black and white photography used to be all about darkrooms, scary-sounding chemicals and red light-bulbs.

I must confess that I have never developed a black and white negative or print. Back in the day, I used to shoot Agfa Scala monochrome slide film,



which you sent off to get processed. These days monochrome is much more welcoming, and chemicals have been replaced by computers.

The attraction of shooting black and white is that with colour removed from our pictures the emphasis falls on composition, form, shape and shadow.

Because water absorbs colour, black and white is particularly suited to the underwater world, and we can take monochrome images without flash. This brings two further bonuses: without strobes our camera rig is much more compact, and it creates no backscatter.

Above: Strong graphic shapes on contrasting backgrounds look great in black and white.

Taken with Nikon D4 and Nikon 16mm. Subal housing. No strobes. ISO 400, 1/100th @ f/10.

MOST SUCCESSFUL black and whites are lit only with ambient light, but how we work the light is really important.

The best shots are usually taken against the light to create silhouettes or across the light to capture a mix of strong shadow and eye-catching highlight. Shooting with the light is best for colour and detail (see June's **DIVER**), but these are not so important in monochrome pictures.

Sunny weather and flat, clear seas give strongly directional light, the most powerful contrast and the all-important shadows. However, in shallow water, flat light from a cloudy sky can be preferable because it does not create high-contrast dancing light patterns on the seabed, which will dominate an image in black and white, hiding everything else.

Consider the photo of the sting ray. The sand ripples play a powerful role in the composition, leading the eye to the

STARTER TIP

Any photo can be converted to black and white, but monochrome tends to suit wide-angle scenes, wrecks or schools photographed in available light.

Don't be afraid of adding lots of contrast to black and white images to make them pop. Unlike colour pictures, they can take it!



Pictured: Black and white suits many wide angle underwater subjects, but we should use monochrome for more artistic reasons than simply rescuing photos that are too blue.

Taken with Nikon D700 and Nikon 16-35mm @ 16mm. Subal housing. No strobes. ISO 500, 1/160th @ f/10.



sting ray. However, they are visible in the picture only because of the shadows, which require specific light conditions.

In sunshine these shadows would be totally overwhelmed by the patterns of light on the shallow seabed.

Black and white particularly suits wide-angle images of wrecks, big animals, silhouettes and schools because these can all offer shadow and strong shapes.

We should look for graphic forms produced by light and dark when we are composing images. It takes a bit of training, but the key is to see in colour, but think in black and white.

ON MANY CAMERAS we can change them into black and white mode. On some compact and mirrorless cameras this will actually make the screen monochrome as you frame up.

On SLRs we can change the picture style to monochrome, so at least we see

Above: Black and white cuts through the murky underwater world, allowing us to take on bigger scenes than any other type of imagery.

Taken with Nikon D4 and Sigma 15mm. Subal housing. No strobes. ISO 320, 1/125th @ f/13.

the results in mono on our LCD.

I do this on my Nikons by switching the picture mode to Monochrome and tuning the mono-mode by adding additional contrast and the in-camera orange filter.

This means that the LCD shows me pictures in black and white that are very close to how the processed files will look.

We should also set the camera to shoot RAW and JPG: the JPG files will be in black and white and the RAWs will always be in colour.

Ultimately, when processed the RAW files will give the best-quality results, but it is very useful to have the black and white JPG as a guide when processing.

Converting pictures to monochrome is easy: convert to greyscale and pump up the contrast. However, we will produce much better results with a little planning at the conversion stage.

The most common mistake is to end up with a water tone, or brightness, that is the same as the subject, so the subject gets lost in with the background.

When converting to black and white use a tool (like the black and white converter in Lightroom or Photoshop) that has sliders for the different colours in the original colour RAW file.

The most important sliders are the blue and cyan ones, which will affect the tone of the background.

ADVANCED TIP

Macro images rarely suit black and white because they are typically all about colour and detail, although we can sometimes generate a memorable picture by showing a creature noted for its colour without it.

Macro images with strong side or backlighting creating strong shadows do produce strong black and whites pictures.

In Silver Efex Pro software we can use the colour filters for the same effect. Use blue filters to make the background lighter relative to the subject, and orange filters to make it darker.

Both light and dark backgrounds work well – what is important is that the background is a different tone to the foreground. In fact I used to shoot black and whites under water using orange or blue filters on my lens to darken or lighten the water relative to the subject. I wrote quite a few articles extolling their virtues, but now improvements in black and white processing software have rendered them unnecessary.

Black and white might seem old-fashioned to some, but with modern cameras and software we've never had it so good.

MID-WATER TIP

A kiss of flash, usually best from a single strobe, can be effective in black and whites, but you should avoid blasting the scene with lots of artificial light. The detail and colour it will reveal has little value in monochrome.

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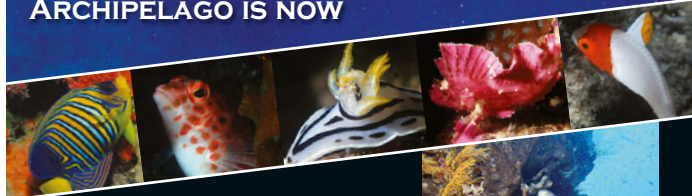
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GUERNSEY WEEKEND



His first ferry trip to Guernsey was frankly a bit of a disaster, but **WILL APPLEYARD** isn't one to give in easily – would his second attempt yield some decent diving?

GOOD THINGS COME to those who wait – that good old English adage extolling the virtue of patience. Too true, I reflected, as we made our second crossing back across the Channel to Poole from Guernsey.

This time we were travelling back in style on Condor Ferries' *Liberation*, its all-new super-fast three-hour ferry, rather than being crammed onto its much older *Clipper* in rough seas, as we had found ourselves on our first Guernsey attempt to check out the island's diving.

Attempt one, at Condor's invitation, had turned out to be a bit of a disaster, because the weather had closed in and the speedy *Liberation* was holed up in St Peter Port, Guernsey, so our dive-gear stayed bone-dry for the weekend.

Attempt two saw us cruising over flat-calm seas in blazing sunshine and with minimal wind, together with the promise that our dive-gear would get a proper soaking this time round.

Prior to both sailings and after some research on what Guernsey has to offer diving-wise, I'd eventually made contact

Above: Cove by the Fermain Valley Hotel.

Right: Matt Eker (*left*), the 'font of all knowledge'.

Centre right: Diver on the reef.

Far right: Lumpsucker.

Below: The *Liberation* ferry.



with what my sources had told me was the "font of all knowledge" where anything diving-, fishing-, or generally sea-related is concerned on Guernsey.

This "font" turned out to be an awesome chap named Matt Eker, who runs Dive Guernsey and whose vessel doubles up as a commercial scallop-diving outfit.

After a few email exchanges, phone-calls and the already-mentioned failed

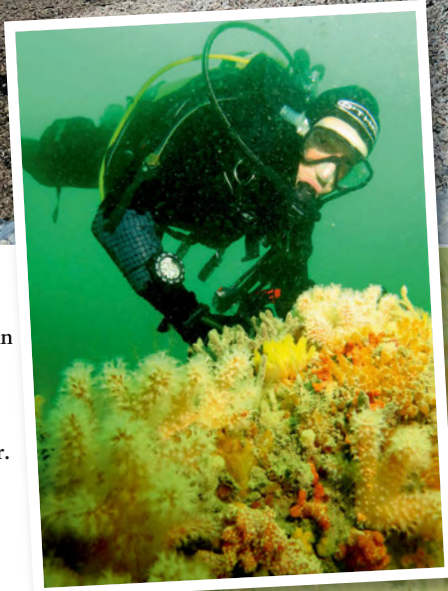
trip to the Channel Islands, we were eventually able to load our gear and a pile of nitrox-filled cylinders onto Matt's boat, which operates out of the harbour at St Peter Port.

Conveniently, Matt's dive centre/shop/air station sits right on the harbour wall itself and, prior to being a dive-shop, had had only one other role as a building – as a WW2 German gun emplacement.

England gave up the Channel Islands to the Germans during the war and its occupation has left an historic mark, with emplacements and fortifications found all along its coastline. Just to explore that historic building was exciting enough for me, let alone what lay ahead for us under water over the coming weekend.

Prior to our trip, Matt had emailed us a selection of itineraries to consider, and with various dive-sites up for grabs, the choice was ours. I immediately warmed to





Matt's relaxed approach, and it was clear from the off that Guernsey didn't really see much in the way of diving tourism.

That's why we had free reign over our schedule, with no other divers' needs or wants to consider.

They don't particularly need visitors either, it seems, which makes for a less rigid and almost VIP experience.

MY DIVE BUDDY for the weekend and I elected to take up Matt's offer of a nice scenic dive to get us going, followed by a decent wreck to give the day some contrast.

From the quaint St Peter Port harbour we gently motored towards some impressive-looking cliffs, and Matt hugged the coastline so that we could absorb the endless view of spectacular beaches and posh cliff-top houses, owned by bankers, retail-chain owners and the like.

Diving with nitrox appears to be the norm in Guernsey, where all the favourite dive-sites seemed to be within the 25-30m mark. The sea-cliffs that surround the island drop steeply and dramatically into the depths and the tidal range alone is around 10m, which I guess accounts for the depth of its most interesting sites.

When diving these kinds of depths around the mainland UK, we'd find ourselves some way offshore, often miles, but that isn't the case in the Channel Islands, where you can find such diving seemingly just metres offshore.

Matt found a submerged pinnacle of rock to put us on. It was named the Ozanne Wall, and on descending the top was found easily at just 8m below the surface, with a drop to a tad over 30m.

Where the rock ran out, a gentle sandy seabed began and sloped off into deeper water still. Reassuringly and thankfully 🍷



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(because I'd left my torch on the boat), the light levels remained constantly good as we made straight for the 30m mark.

Descending the wall of rock, I was blown away by the abundance of soft corals, fans and sponges that decorated every inch of space until we hit sand.

The water clarity was up there with what I would consider to be great UK diving conditions – the type of “*yeah, but you should have been here last week*” kind of vis about which we all like to brag.

Actually, Matt did say that we should have been there last week... We cruised about the pinnacle with ample bottom times owing to our generous nitrox fills, and spent time with a selection of fishy friends that appeared as curious about us as we were about them.

A highlight was a chance meeting with a photogenic lumpsucker, which I later found are now quite rare off Guernsey.

It's alleged that they're taken from their natural environment to service salmon farms elsewhere as some kind of cleaner fish.

We kicked slowly back up the pinnacle wall, which eventually brought us to our safety stop and then finally back aboard the boat. Being a commercial fishing and diving vessel, Matt's boat doesn't come equipped with a diver-lift, so if you were considering bringing your twin-set with you, I'd think again. Access to the boat is via a ladder thrown over the side as and when it's needed.

OUR SURFACE INTERVAL was spent tucked into an idyllic-looking cove, which coincidentally formed part of the grounds of the hotel where we were staying.

While absorbing our beautiful surroundings, we considered what we might like to do for our next dive and



Clockwise from top: Loading dive-gear at St Peter Port; seafan; the dive-centre is a former WW2 German defence emplacement; Will Appleyard meets spider crab.

Top centre: Ocean Frontiers dive-boats ready to go.

Matt's description of the *Oost Vlaanderen* or the Cement Wreck, as it's known locally, sounded right up our alley.

The Dutch-built barge was carrying a cargo of cement and guns before the Royal Air Force spoilt her day during WW2. Today the wreck sits in 32m of water, upright and, from Matt's description, a proper, friendly wreck with many recognisable features still in place.

On finding the site, post tea and sandwiches, we mucked in to help drop the shot in the right place.

Looking overboard, we could see that the visibility looked promising. I had a feeling that this was to be an exciting dive.

On descending the shotline of a wreck, it's always a great feeling when you notice the light levels remaining constantly good – and you know it's going to be a great dive when the wreck appears with 10m-plus of descent still to make.

That was the situation here, and on reaching the seabed at 32m the gigantic structure loomed above us. The impressive bow was easy to identify, and after diving countless tangled heaps of metal in UK waters, it was refreshing to dive on a wreck that was unmistakably boat-shaped.

A slight current stayed with us, but it was easy to escape from in the lee of its



pull. We made for the deck-level where the holds are visible and provide some interesting swim-throughs in places where areas of metal have given way.

Heading towards the stern, we found the remains of the wheelhouse and a set of inviting-looking stairs that we had been told pre-dive led to the engine-room.

We were able to wriggle some way in and could probably have made it down the stairs, but my sensible side took over and we left it alone.

A circuit of the wreck can be completed in one dive and this is a perfect nitrox site depth-wise. With 10-15m of visibility on our side, locating the shotline again was simple.

Feeling super-pumped post-dive and with the pub now firmly in our minds, we made the short journey back to St Peter Port, where we unloaded the cylinders ready to fill for day two of our expedition.

IT TAKES ABOUT AN HOUR to drive round the whole island by car and it's well worth making this part of your trip itinerary. The jagged cliffs give way to white sandy beaches, which are in turn peppered with German defensive structures, many looking as if they were built only yesterday.

St Peter Port, the capital, is home to a decent selection of pubs, restaurants and coffee-shops alongside all those shops you'd expect to find on a UK high street. The islanders are clearly proud of their home, and I struggled to find a shred of plastic or litter on any of the beaches that we visited.

The weather remained good for day two, although the wind had picked up slightly, so the dive-sites we could have looked at round the island of Sark were now unreachable.

I'm told that these sites are well worth a visit, so put them on your schedule if you visit Guernsey.

We decided to explore two more reef sites, the Sheep Reef and Longue Pierre, East Face – both of which can take you down to 45-50m if you so desire.

These sites are reasonably sheer walls that come festooned with jewel



Top: Inside the Cement Wreck.

Above: Waiting to go – Will Appleyard is centre.

Below: Watching the *Liberation* depart.

anemones, fans and corals and reminded me of the type of diving one would experience in Cornwall.

One or two barrel jellyfish made an appearance too; these giants have been spotted all around the UK south coast over the past couple of summers and reach an impressive size.

Matt had invited a scallop-diver friend to join the boat for day two so we felt over-dressed in our wings, cameras and additional bits of kit, as he threw on just a cylinder, backplate and what looked like a single hose coming from his first stage.

With everything in very close

proximity to St Peter Port, including the dive-sites we had chosen, we were able to pop back to town for lunch before heading out again for our second dive of the day.

The ferry terminal sits right by the town too, so there were no worries about leaving lots of time to make our return journey home.


I asked Matt on our way back to port why there wasn't a bigger diving scene in Guernsey, especially where visiting divers were concerned. He thought that holiday divers might weigh the cost of a Red Sea holiday favourably against the cost of the ferry and a hotel because there wasn't much in it.

That said, you could load a car with dive gear and take two people for a three-day visit on the *Liberation* for around £210. Coldwater diving is what it's all about here, so if you're more inclined to spend a week in a light wetsuit in guaranteed weather, perhaps the Red Sea is where your money is better spent.

I LOVED THE FACT that the diving around Guernsey is unique and it felt as if I was doing something not many divers normally do. I also liked the idea of a tailored VIP-style dive trip, visiting pristine coldwater sites with the feeling that you're the first people to dive them.

Matt's relaxed approach meant that we could change the schedule if required, and he really did turn out to be the font of all knowledge. Diving anywhere in the world and using an island as your base is exciting, whether it's Guernsey, Lundy, the Maldives or the Brothers.

My advice would be to take a break from the norm, peel away from the crowds and do something different by visiting Guernsey with your dive buddies.

Before you take that plunge, however, do check that the weather is going to be on your side before you leave for the island – because getting home again isn't much fun when the sea is angry. 



PRICES

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FERMAIN VALLEY HOTEL £340 for two people sharing for three nights, www.fermainvalley.com

DIVE GUERNSEY Around £20 per dive, www.diveguernsey.co.uk

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AT THE 25TH NEC DIVE SHOW

SET ASIDE AS MUCH OF THE WEEKEND of 24/25 October as possible, because the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham will be awash with divers and you and your friends and family need to be there with them.

DIVE 2015 is the Show of the Year, and it's an extra-special event because it marks 25 years of successful Shows organised at the NEC by the DIVER Group in that time.

Booking ahead brings significant cash savings but every ticket sale brings with it the chance to win a fortnight's dive trip for two to the Mexican Pacific worth £8000 in the **GRAND PRIZE DRAW** – mouth-watering details across the page.

ON THE FLOOR

Get your bearings at the **NEW PRODUCT SHOWCASE**, a snapshot of the diving-equipment market's latest offerings, and decide which kit you want to look at in more depth around the aisles.

You might even decide to try some of it out in the **TECHNICAL POOL**, especially if it's one of the new generation of rebreathers.

You don't have to be a CCR diver to get wet, of course – for beginners the **TRY-DIVE POOL** awaits, with **STONEY COVE DIVE SCHOOL** divers standing by to introduce them to the joys a regulator, tank and BC can offer.

But you don't even have to get wet to dive at the show – not when you can take time out to enjoy the ever-popular **NO-TANX 3D SIMULATOR** and **TOTAL IMMERSION FREEDIVE EXPERIENCE**. You'll be transported back to the sea...

As usual, one of the pleasures of the Dive Show is the chance to meet the people who have hosted your dive holidays in the past or who will welcome you on trips in the future.

Whether you're catching up or looking for



information, check out the **ASIA-PACIFIC SHOWCASE, CARIBBEAN VILLAGE, BRITISH ISLES EXPERIENCE** and all the other parts of the diving world represented around the hall and find out where your next dive-trip will take you.

Kit ticked, holidays ticked – and the third part of the equation is skills development, with a number of training agencies represented at DIVE 2015.

The **PADI VILLAGE** and **SSI ZONE** offer a further swathe of training and travel ideas, while the **BRITISH SUB-AQUA CLUB**, which is holding its annual conference at the NEC, will be present in force with its **BRANCH PODS**.

Then there is the **PHOTOZONE**, where kit, holidays and training combine in a magnificent outpouring of underwater photographic talent. Take part in judging the **BRITISH SOCIETY OF UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS' annual PRINTS COMPETITION** and get involved in the constant exchange of tips and ideas flowing between speakers, exhibitors and visitors.

Inlet about to head north to establish camp at the northern tip of Baffin Island – how about 'Diving the Wild Places?' Sounds good!

MARK POWELL: "Training Doesn't Work" – some of the problems with current scuba-diving training and what we can do to fix those problems. Controversy alert – not for the first time with this popular Show presenter.

MONTY HALLS will be back from an exciting top-secret expedition "and doubtless I'll be blithering on about it at the Dive Shows," he said in last month's column, so stand by for hot news! Monty's custom Land-Rover Defender and Humber RIB will be back too, and with him at the Show. The trip? We hear that sharks may have been involved...

LOUISE TREWAVAS: "The All-Time Top 10 Diving Mistakes – And How To Survive Them." We've all been there – more advice you can't afford to miss.

ALEX MUSTARD is the man who straightened us all out about the contents of our favourite Red Sea wreck, and he'll be back with a new twist on "Thistlethorn's Cargo" which requires you to get involved – more in the September issue.

Alex will also be talking in the PhotoZone alongside **MARTIN EDGE** – and talking of the PhotoZone, drop into the audience at the Centre Stage to see some of the finest double acts since Eric & Ernie, including **SAEED RASHID & NIGEL WADE, NICK & CAROLINE ROBERTSON-BROWN** and **JANE MORGAN & GILL MCDONALD**.



ON THE STAGES

The 25th Dive Show line-up of diving presentations take place on the main **DIVER STAGE**, the **CENTRE STAGE** and in the two **OCEAN THEATRES** and although it's early days yet we can promise you treats in store:

PAUL ROSE: "What will you be talking about, Paul?" "I'm here at Pond

DIVE 2015 tickets cost £13.50 – but only £9.50 in advance, or £8.50 if you buy six or more. Book now at www.diveshows.co.uk



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to April, subject to availability) humpback whales. This area isn't referred to as "the Mexican Galapagos" for nothing

The prize, organised by UK tour operator The Scuba Place,

comprises flights from London to Cabo San Lucas, one night all-inclusive hotel accommodation in the suite-only Dreams Cabo San Lucas Resort & Spa; nine nights on board either the spectacular *Nautilus Belle*

Amie or *Explorer* on a full-board basis, and two further nights back in Cabo to get your land-legs back! All airport transfers are included.

Socorro is one of the hottest dive destinations on the market, so don't miss this or any opportunity to dive it! All this could be yours and a

buddy's – just buy a DIVE 2015 ticket! *Terms & conditions apply.*



Nautilus Explorer
Belle Amie*
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Some of the Egyptian Red Sea's inshore reefs have what it takes to inspire

rock gods, according to
GAVIN PARSONS

UNLESS YOU'RE A LED ZEPPELIN aficionado, you may not know that the song *Stairway to Heaven*, written by Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, was inspired by natural beauty.

The 1970s rock anthem, named one of the best rock songs of all time, was born in the beautiful wilderness of the Welsh countryside when Page and Plant were staying in a small cottage without electricity or running water.

It was never even released as a single, yet it's a song that permeates through generations. Youngsters still wear Led Zeppelin T-shirts and the sheet music of the song continues to sell tens of thousands of copies each year.

The song has not only been an inspiration to generations of music-lovers and musicians, but also to divers in the deep southern Egyptian Red Sea.

They found a site with a view they must have felt compared to the rugged landscapes that caused Page and Plant to pen the song.

STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN is actually a part of a dive with the rather uninspired name of Lahami South, which doesn't do the place justice at all. Hands down, this is one of the best Red Sea dives I have ever done.

Wadi Lahami (pronounced *lakmi*) is an eco-dive camp run by Red Sea Diving Safaris, which also runs the popular Marsa Shagra resort near Marsa Alam.

Wadi Lahami and another resort run by the company, Marsa Nakari, lie further south towards the Sudanese border. Wadi Lahami is the nearest to Sudan and about as far off the beaten track as you can get in Egypt. It's a place where the stars welcome you at night and ospreys give you a wake-up call in the morning.

It's probably an overused statement but Wadi Lahami is a step back in time – it's Red Sea diving as it used to be.

Lahami South is a reef about six miles straight out from the resort, within the Fury Shoals. It's a 10-minute RIB-ride from the resort and looks, from the surface, like all the other reefs in the shoal, but it is not.

The start is ordinary enough by Fury Shoals standards, bearing in mind that

Fury Shoals is arguably one of the best locations in the Red Sea.

It's why liveboards stop here on the southern itineraries. So it's as ordinary as a magician pulling white doves out of a hat while humming the national anthem and peddling a unicycle uphill on gravel.

The hard corals are in superb condition and all the usual marine life is around. Being so far south there is always the

Above: A diver approaches the surface at Lahami South.

chance of a shark sighting, but even without one the marine life is as good as an icecream sundae with not just a cherry on top, but chocolate sprinkles and mini marshmallows.

ONCE SETTLED INTO THE DIVE, you grow accustomed to the sheer brilliance of the hard corals and the endless stream of fish. Experienced divers may feel a dip in





their enthusiasm for the site, but that is temporary.

Imagine, if you will, walking down a normal British high street. All the usual shops are present. There's a Boots, WH Smith, M&S, Costa Coffee, Next and so on. Then you turn a corner and are confronted by Harrods, Selfridges and Fortnam & Mason, all next to each other and all in their Christmas finery. That's

Above, clockwise from top left: Stairway to Heaven is too big a section of coral to convey in a picture; this far south most of the coral is healthy; the Stairway ends under a dramatic coral archway; the top of Lahami South is a healthy reef; Salah – like swimming through an aquarium.

the best way I can describe how this reef changes. You pop around a corner and are confronted with what the dive-guides call the Stairway to Heaven.

It's a sort of gully with hard corals rising in a series of steps from 18m to about 6m. The coral is so packed together that you can't see where one ends and another starts.

Up and up you go, flanked on three

sides by pristine collections of branching, brain, star, and table corals of many different types.

It doesn't end at the top either, as the Stairway to Heaven comes to a close under a dramatic archway that reaches out from the main reef.

The sun sends lances of dancing light across the seabed through the aperture, creating a magical scene you'd perhaps

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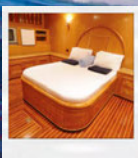
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expect to see in a big-budget sci-fi movie. The dive ends in spectacular style too, because the reef-top is full of healthy corals bathing in the glorious never-ending Egyptian sunlight.

I exited the water elated and with a smile that didn't abate until I was back on shore. It really is an awesome dive.

It isn't, of course, the only dive worth doing out of Wadi Lahami. Unlike Red Sea Diving Safari's other resorts, Lahami offers no shore-dives – it's boat-diving only. A couple of high-powered RIBs are there to whisk divers off to the near-shore reefs. The centre runs a couple of dives a day, and some are up to an hour away, others just a few minutes.

Apart from Lahami South, there is also Lahami North, Abu Galawa, Iron Garden, Sarayah, Malahl and several sites just off the shore.

All the above are familiar names to southern Red Sea liveaboard divers, and I have dived several over the years, but a new one to me is actually one of the smallest sites in the area.

Salah is a large pinnacle with a cleft in the middle of it. The seabed is about 18m

Above: Sunset over Wadi Lahami's stone cottages.

Right: Resident hawksbill turtle at Marsa Nakari.

Below right: Swimming through the reef at Marsa Nakari.

Below left: You have to look really carefully to see these tiny coral blennies. This one is about half the size of a little fingernail.



down and is a flat plateau. You start diving around the bottom of the pinnacle and work your way around and up.

All pretty standard stuff really, but it is incredibly beautiful.

A SHOAL OF GOATFISH hang out in the cleft and they are worth a couple of visits, because you can swim through the shoal and have them open around you, which is a lovely feeling.

In my opinion, however, this dive only really gets going towards the end.

In the shallows, where most people start thinking about what to do for the next three minutes, is a pinnacle-top as spectacular as any I've seen.

Many reef-tops are pretty barren, with tired and bored-looking parrotfish scratching a living from the dead algae-covered coral, but not here. This is a lush, healthy reef system with hard and soft coral, seafans, whips and a moving blanket of fish life so lush it sometimes block out the sun.

This is a perfect afternoon dive, as the sun dapples light across the scene. I may as well try to describe the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as this reef, because none of my words can come close to describing its jaw-dropping beauty.

One of the benefits of land-based southern Egypt is the shore-diving. Lahami offers none because there's a

mangrove stand in front of it and the water is about as deep as a baby's bathtub – but just up the coast is Marsa Nakari.

This resort is set in a small bay with deep water close to shore. There is a north reef, a south reef and you can book boat dives too.

I opted for the shore, because I like the relaxed nature of this style of diving. There is no timetable to follow; you just write your name on the board and wander into the water.

The bay forms into a gully very quickly and the sand falls away quite sharply, so rough weather up top is soon forgotten.

Shore-dives are usually pretty samey affairs – they can be “smash you in the face with a wet rag” impressive but they tend to be fringing reefs and form the same sort of pattern. a fairly barren reef-top and a wall of hard coral giving way to a patchy sand and coral garden.

Not at Nakari. The southern reef starts as a pretty standard wall, but as you get to the outer reaches of the bay the coral goes all Gaudi on your visual cortex.

All of a sudden huge stacks appear, with gullies and swim-throughs. It's as if someone gave the coral some pretty weird substances several thousand years ago, and it went bonkers and creative.

THE SHAME OF IT WAS that we had decided not to book a RIB back to shore and had to swim back, so we didn't get the chance to explore more here.

On the upside, on the way back we encountered a hawksbill turtle that seems to be a resident as it's become something of a YouTube star (it's in every video of Marsa Nakari).

Also on the way back, right in the shallows, was a large barracuda that lives



Above: Spectacular shore-diving at Marsa Nakari.



Right: Two divers pass through a cleft at Lahami South.



FACTFILE



GETTING THERE ▶ Flights to Marsa Alam and you are bussed to the resorts.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Wadi Lahami and Marsa Nakari are both operated by Red Sea Diving Safari. Full-board stays can be booked for each resort or you can go for a combination trip. Each centre has a restaurant area serving buffet meals, bar, shop and dive centre, www.redseadivingsafari.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ The resorts are open year-round, but the summer is very hot, so spring, autumn and winter are perhaps the best times to visit.

MONEY ▶ Credit card, pounds or euros.

PRICES ▶ A week at Wadi Lahami starts at £880 and at Marsa Nakari £795 with Oonasdivers, which represents Red Sea Diving Safari in the UK. This includes flights, transfers, seven nights' full board in a Beach Safari tent (upgrades to a stone-built chalet are available) and five days' offshore RIB diving (Wadi Lahami) or five days' unlimited house-reef diving including four guided dives (Marsa Nakari), www.oonasdivers.com

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under the centre's resident safari boat, plus a myriad of reef critters all over the reef. The slow bumble back was both relaxed and gave us plenty of time to seek out the smallest reef inhabitants.

It was yet another dive that slapped me in the face with a wet sponge, then gave me a big sloppy kiss for good measure.

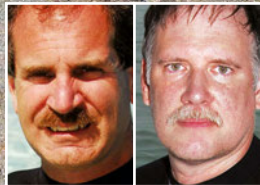
I've only given you a taste of the diving on offer in this part of the Red Sea. Ordinarily divers would visit here on liveboards, but land-based operations such as Red Sea Diving Safaris offer a completely different experience.

Wadi Lahami, for example, is no 5* hotel. It's a place to get away from the trappings of western society, a step away from the bustle of the world and immensely better for it.

Even the new crop of posh resorts has pretty much run out by the time you get this far from the main airports.

On land it may not be as lushly green as the inspirational hills and valleys, but under water the riot of natural beauty would, I'm sure, have caused Led Zeppelin to pen *Stairway to Heaven* had they come here instead of Wales.

FROM SMUGGLER TO SHIPWRECK



MICHAEL SALVAREZZA and **CHRISTOPHER P. WEAVER** get to dive Florida's *Golden Venture* and delve into the shady background of this notorious vessel

THE SEA FLOOR OFF FLORIDA is littered with shipwrecks of all sizes, shapes and types. Many have been intentionally sunk as part of a progressive and forward-looking artificial reef programme, and have become popular with scuba-divers looking to explore their remains.

Even though many of these ships were put down after becoming obsolete, they all carry with them the stories of their existence.

Some of these stories are mundane and routine. But some are different... darker, more tragic, more significant.

After a short run to the dive-site from the Boca Raton Inlet, we prepare to descend to the final resting place of one of these seemingly unremarkable wrecks, the *United Caribbean*. However, this vessel, intentionally sunk on 22 August, 2000 in

23m of water, once bore the name *Golden Venture* and the shadows of a tragic and notorious past.

With almost 25m of visibility the outline of the wreck is almost immediately apparent as we drop below the surface. Once fully intact, since its sinking the wreck has been torn into three pieces as a result of several hurricanes that passed directly overhead.

The highest point of profile is the wheelhouse, which rises to within 17m of the surface, and it is here that we first made contact with the wreck.

Like the rest of it, this area is covered in carpets of orange and yellow cup corals, evidence that the wreck has transformed nicely into a living reef.

The wheelhouse is the only area in which divers can penetrate the wreck. After ensuring the safety of going inside,

Above: The remains of the mid-section of the *Golden Venture*.

Below: This Goliath grouper (*Epinephelus itajara*) has taken up residence on the wreck.

we quickly enter the brightly illuminated structure.

Swimming through the bridge causes us to reflect on the curious notion that we are now floating through an area from which the commanders of this vessel once issued their criminal orders...



The infamous voyage

After 114 days on the high seas, the lights of New York City finally appeared on the horizon and the 286 passengers of the *Golden Venture* began to rejoice. The free world at last!

The shores of America were now so close for those on board, and the long and arduous journey that brought them all the way from China was about to come to an end. With little more than a plastic bag of belongings each, some with only the clothing on their back, these people didn't fully understand what lay ahead of them.

Most had paid upwards of \$40,000 to be brought into the USA illegally, and these debts would have to be paid through years of virtual indentured servitude.

The passage on the *Golden Venture* had been arranged through Chinese gang leaders and contacts in New York, and the entire illegal human-trafficking operation, known as "Snakehead", had been working undetected for years.

In the dark of night on 6 June, 1993, however, this was all about to change.

As the chatter about leaving the boat and the prospects of starting a new life in a new country began to grow, the *Golden Venture* came to an abrupt stop. In the inky darkness, chaos fell upon the human cargo of this vessel.

Despite the shuddering of the engines and the straining of the propellers, the boat had stopped hard, stuck on a sandbar just a few hundred metres off Rockaway Beach in Queens, New York, located along the south shore of Long Island.

After travelling from Thailand, and stopping in Kenya to pick up additional passengers, the *Golden Venture* was now within shouting distance of the shore, and the sounds of the crashing surf could easily be heard in the darkness.

The motivation to reach freedom was powerful. The passengers, who had endured a voyage of squalor and hardship subsisting on rice, dirty water and spoiled food, were now panicking.

Many began to jump into the frigid waters of the Atlantic, attempting to flee the stranded vessel and reach the shore.

Ten drowned in the effort, and the Immigration & Naturalisation Service took most of the remaining survivors



into custody. Many were held in various prisons throughout the USA while they applied for the right of asylum.

Some 10% were eventually granted asylum, minors were released and half of the remainder were deported.

President Bill Clinton eventually released the final 52 on 27 February, 1997.

After the stranding, the *Golden Venture* was initially confiscated by the federal government, but was eventually sold at auction and renamed the *United Caribbean*.

She began service as a cargo vessel throughout the Caribbean but was later purchased by Palm Beach County in Florida for \$60,000 and sunk as an artificial reef a mile off Boca Raton Inlet.

Swimming with ghosts

We leave the wheelhouse to swim along the mid-section of the wreck. Here, low-lying to the sandy bottom, are the bones of the ship. We encounter schools of tomtate, grunt and snapper, along with the regal French angelfish and other tropical fish species.

But even as we swim among these beautiful inhabitants of the wreck, we can't shake the feeling that we are also swimming with the ghosts of a dark incident in our history.

Making our way forward towards the bow, some additional wreckage can be encountered, and it is here that divers can find Goliath grouper hanging out under the protective cover of the wreck.

These huge fish, now protected by law, have been making a recovery in Florida waters after being fished to near-extinction years ago. They glower at us from the deeper recesses of the wreckage, their fearsome countenances belying their peaceful nature.

Searching along the bottom, we find the comical polka-dot batfish creeping along the sand. These fish resemble some sort of distorted Mr Potato Head, with their oddly shaped mouths and other appendages.



Top left: The polka-dot batfish has an angry-looking scowl.

Top right: A regal French angelfish (*Pomacanthus paru*) patrols the wreck.

Above: A diver explores the wreckage.

Indeed the *Golden Venture*, now reposing on the bottom as the *United Caribbean*, seems to be fulfilling its final mission as an artificial reef and fish haven.

Our dive concludes with a return to the wheelhouse and an ascent on the upline.

As we bid farewell to the wreck, we reflect on the importance of this little-known ship in the tragic story of human trafficking and forced labour.

A call to action

The plight of the Chinese people aboard the *Golden Venture* shone a light on the desperation of those seeking to flee oppression and poverty and begin life anew in America or elsewhere.

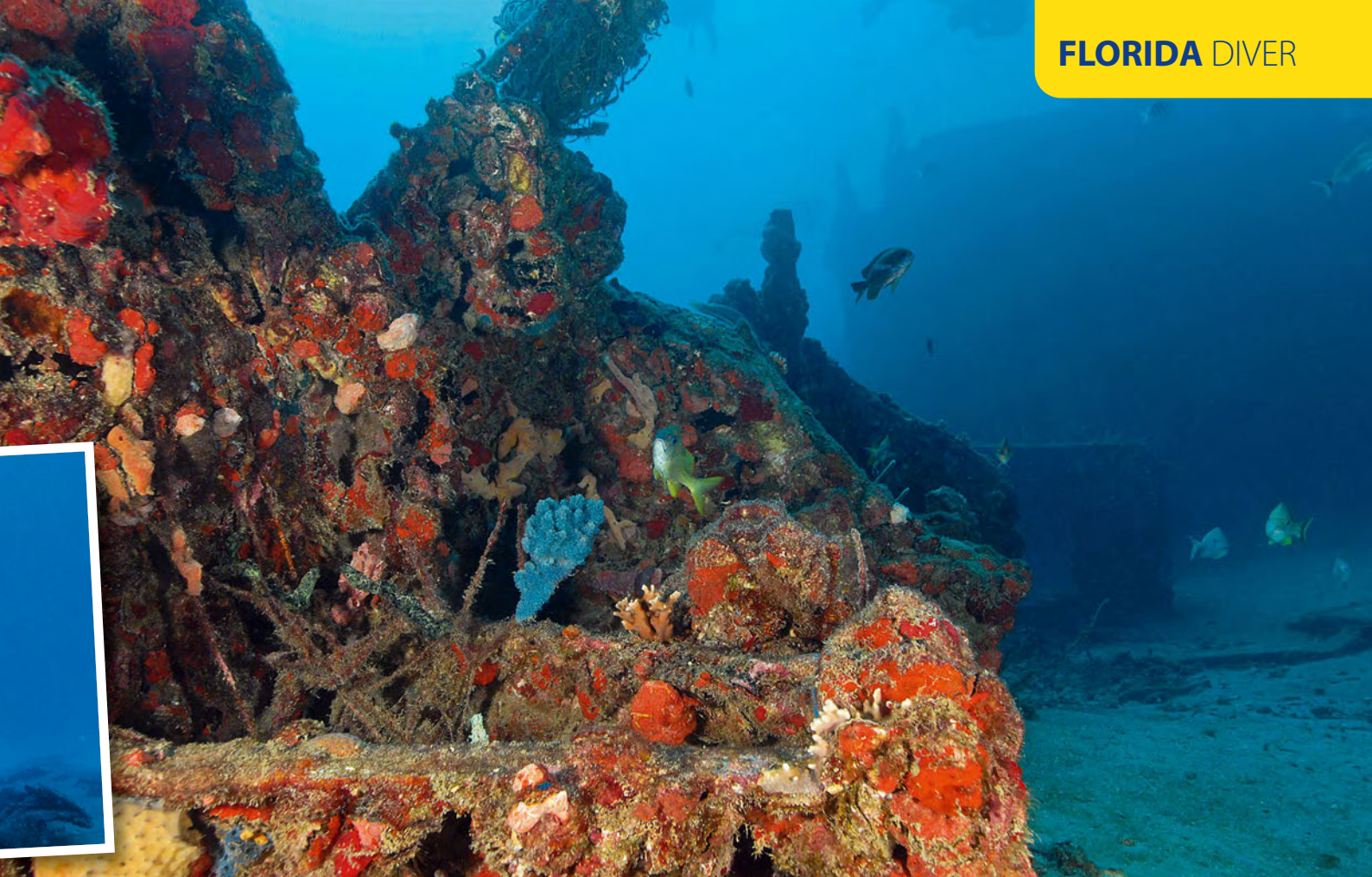
Vulnerable to extortion and exploitation, illegal aliens ferried abroad in this way often find themselves forever unable to pay the debts they have incurred at the hands of gangsters and other criminal enterprises.

Life becomes a form of slavery, and many find themselves working in restaurants, factories and other businesses for minimal wages and little prospect of real freedom. Some drift into worse situations, such as the illegal sex trade, and for them the degradation continues and grows deeper.

But as a result of the *Golden Venture's* high-profile stranding, which was covered extensively in the media, those responsible for this particular initiative were brought to justice.



Left: The *Golden Venture* on the sandbar off Rockaway Beach, Queens, New York.



It was Cheng Chui Ping, known in the Chinese community as “Sister Ping”, who provided the cash to purchase the ageing *Golden Venture* in Thailand, and charged the passengers their fee for the voyage from Asia to New York.

At trial, it was revealed that Cheng, despite her humble appearance and modest living conditions in New York’s Chinatown, owned a multi-national multi-million-dollar underground banking network that stretched from New York to Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and China.

On 17 March, 2006, she was sentenced to 35 years’ jail for her role in the *Golden Venture* operation. Ping died in prison of pancreatic cancer in April last year.

Slavery, and its close relative human-trafficking, is thriving, and affects businesses, suppliers and consumers.

Above: The *Golden Venture* is now an artificial reef.

Below left: The modest apartment house where “Sister Ping” ran her human-smuggling operation.

Right: The final resting place of the *Golden Venture* is just offshore of Boca Raton Inlet in Florida.

Estimates are that 21-35 million people are currently trapped in modern-day slavery, with someone enslaved every 15 minutes around the world.

Although most organisations agree that the highest incidence is in Asia, particularly India and China, virtually every country in the world is affected. Even in the UK it is estimated that 8500 people are enslaved.

Recently, the global seafood business has come under scrutiny as fishing operations in Thailand, the world’s third largest seafood exporter, along with Indonesia and Burma, have been shown to be using slave labour to work the vessels that catch the fish that eventually find their way into our shops.

In the often shadowy world of international fishing, how can we divers who care about the marine environment and the health of the world’s oceans reasonably expect such operations to respect fishing regulations when they are willing to break society’s laws and moral codes by using slave labour?

Perhaps a small, unremarkable wreck off the coast of Florida can help to inspire in divers a call to action to begin to help eliminate this scourge from the modern world.

vessel and close your eyes, because the ghosts of the past still exist here.

The pain of the desperate passengers, exploited by criminal enterprise and victims of the continuing problem of immigration, can still be felt on this shipwreck.

Swimming over the mid-section, imagine for a moment the squalor and inhumane conditions that existed for four months as the ship ploughed its way towards America.

As you swim over the bow, think of the fear and panic on board as the ship ran aground.

And remember the 10 lives lost that fateful night in New York as terrified passengers jumped to their death in their final desperate effort to achieve freedom.

Divers exploring this wreck can help the world address the problem of modern-day slavery by connecting their dives with the history of this vessel, and with the difficult issue it represents.

The lonely vigil

The *United Caribbean* makes a nice wreck dive, but pause for a moment as you swim through the decaying structure of the



* Dive the wreck from the *Diversity*, SunStar Aquatics, Boca Raton, thediversity.com/index.html



SPEED DEMON

SCUBALAB
2013
TESTERS'
CHOICE



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Atomic Aquatics

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Which is the best online dive-logging software available for free?
ENRICO COLAUTTI
compares the offerings from seven sites

NOW THAT ALMOST EVERYBODY has a smartphone, a tablet or at least a computer, is the old faithful paper logbook still necessary? What about moving to the virtual world and carrying your logbook with you all the time?

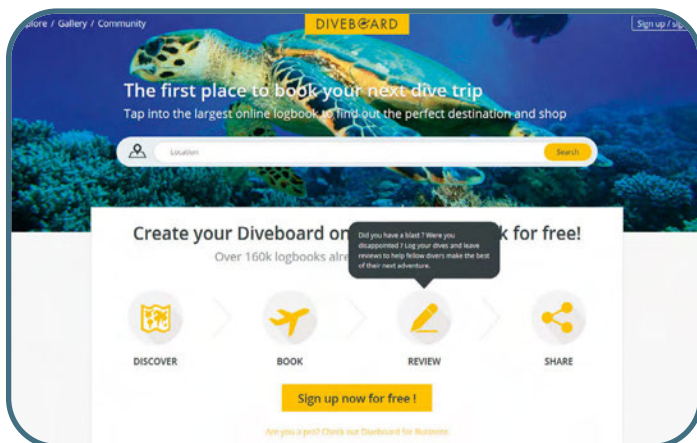
Electronic loggers are available in several flavours, from old desktop programs available for Windows, Linux and Mac OSx systems to mobile app and online sites.

I've been looking at some of the online services available to scuba-divers, checking their features and how friendly and easy to use they are. In particular I have looked for ease of use, data import, logs export and print, and overall user experience.

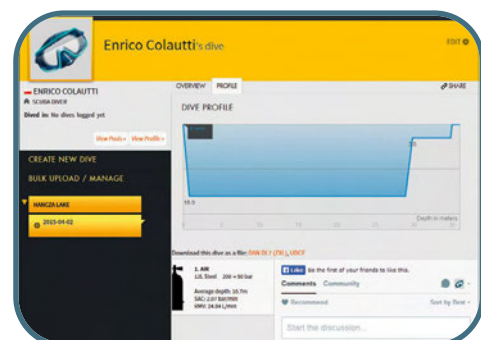
Website loggers are online loggers accessible from any device with an Internet connection. Usually they offer adaptive technology, changing the way data is displayed according to the device screen size.

This means that it offers easy use of the logger on a smartphone with a 4in screen as well as on a desktop computer with a 27in screen.

Diveboard.com



This claims to be the largest online logbook. Let's register a new account and see what it offers. The process is fast and easy, with only three fields to complete: nickname, email and password. Immediately I'm presented with my logbook and I can start and fill in my dives.



The screens are simple to navigate with all the necessary options, without being overwhelming or confusing.

An interesting option is the Wallet, where it's possible to upload scans of our documents, such as diving licences or

medical certificates.

Adding a new dive is an easy job. The data is logically divided among several tabs. Of course, there's no need to fill all the fields, and with a few clicks the essential data is inserted and saved.

After saving, the dive data is displayed in an overview panel that also has a direct connection to Facebook. It looks a bit poor against other online loggers, but the essential data is there, together with the possibility of downloading the dive data in a couple of formats.

Unfortunately I couldn't find any way to print my logged dive directly from the site. On the other hand, data import is quite robust, with a good choice of data formats.

PLUS: Easy navigation, Facebook integration
MINUS: Limited data export. No logbook printing
WEBSITE: www.diveboard.com

PADI ScubaEarth

This site is managed by PADI. Registration is a three-step procedure – at least it was for me, as I don't have a PADI number. More data is required here than on other sites: an address, date of birth and an email confirmation procedure.

After logging in, I'm presented with an efficient and elegant desktop. All



ANTONIO GUILLEM | DREAMSTIME.COM



necessary links and information are easily available.

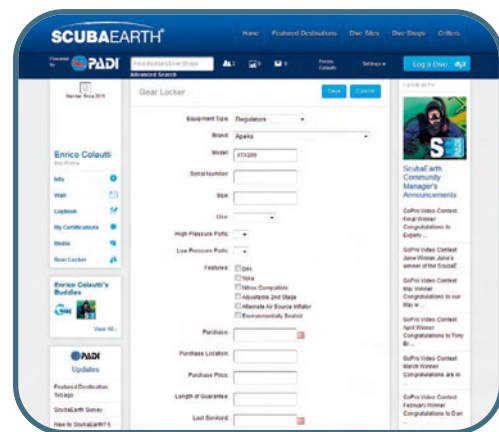
Adding a divelog entry is a five-step procedure that can be shortened to only two steps. Dive-gear, activities and media tabs are optional; I need only to enter a dive-site and my dive data.

After saving the dive data and moving back to the main diver page, the data is loaded quite slowly.

I also had a few "data retrieving failure" messages before I could eventually see my dive list.

A useful feature is the Gear Locker, where it's possible to create a list of all your equipment items. This is also useful as a handy reminder of guarantee durations and service dates.

Unfortunately I couldn't find a way to upload dive data, nor to download or print my logbook.



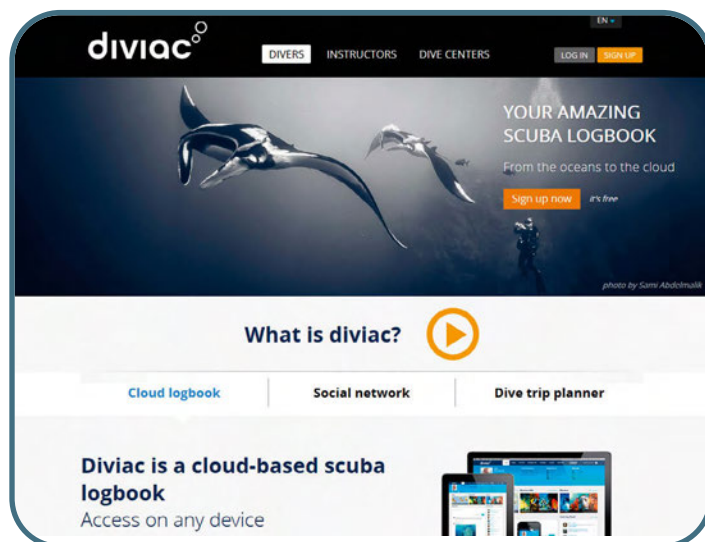
PLUS: Easy dive log procedure, Gear Locker
MINUS: Limited data upload. No logbook printing
WEBSITE: www.scubaearth.com

Diviac

One of the newest dive-logging sites, Diviac aims at creating a scuba-diver community by integrating logbooks with a social network and a dive-trip planner. It also has different registration procedures for divers, instructors and dive-centres.

It is also the only site offering a premium membership. For US \$14.99 a year or \$29.97 for three years, some more options become available. These are customisation and time-saving with pre-fillable log templates; reporting; personal fish-sightings tracking; priority support; 1GB of photo storage; and dive-computer connectivity

The last option should be available for free in my opinion, because an easy way to add data to a logbook would attract far more users and expand the site

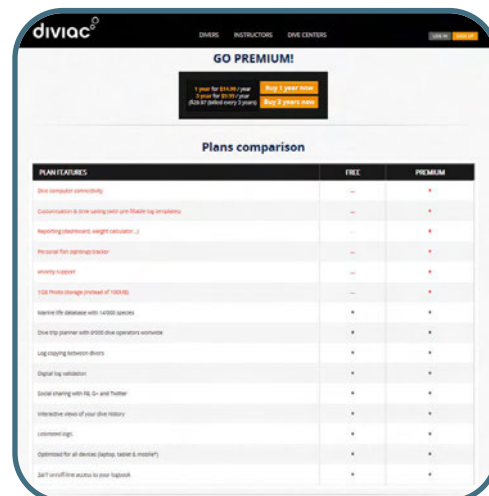


community.

Adding a dive is very easy. There is a great graphical interface with easy-to-set parameters.

Typing is reduced to a minimum because a lot of data is inserted by clicking on buttons or moving slider cursors. The dive can also be verified by a buddy or instructor.

Again, I couldn't



find a logbook printing option, at least in the free membership, and hope this is available as a report for premium members.

PLUS: Huge diving spots and dive-centre databases,

appealing graphics, buddy dive verification
MINUS: Premium fee, limited import/export options, no logbook printing options in free membership
WEBSITE: www.diviac.com

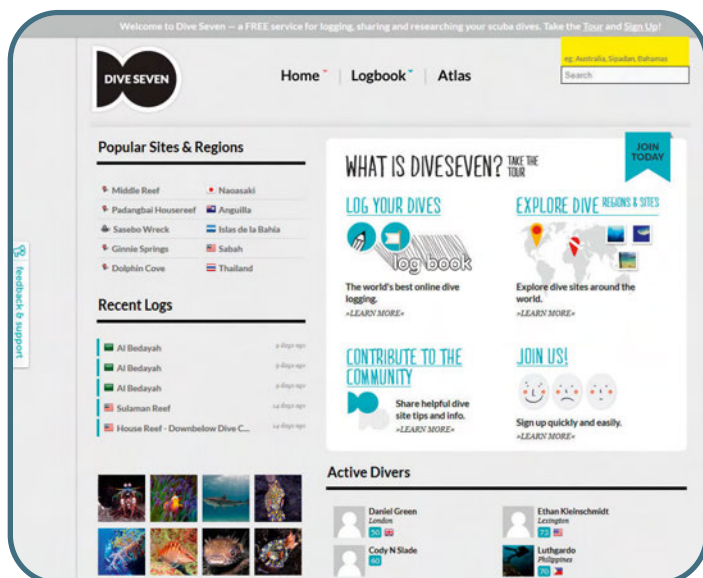
Diveseven

Login is via social account only – Facebook, Google or Yahoo. Indeed, I couldn't login with my Google account as Google moved to OpenID 2.0 and Diveseven uses an older protocol.

The user personal settings page is quite simple, just the basic data plus a preferred-units window with a choice between metric and imperial units.

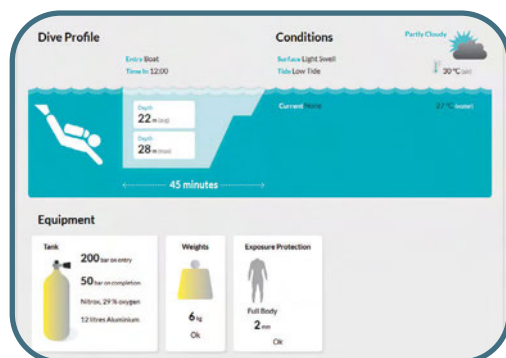
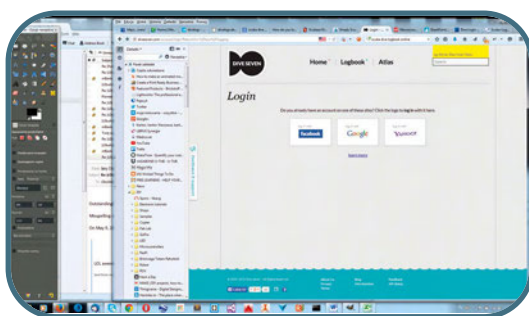
There are no gear-listing or import/export options.

Adding a new dive is a similar process to Diviac's, with a lot of buttons from



which to choose, but presented in a less appealing way.

I found it very easy to do, and at the end I had the option to publish the dive-log to



Facebook – perfect if you like to show your buddies your last dive.

After saving, the logged dive overview has a much nicer visual presentation than the previous form. I liked the simple and clear infographics

containing all the dive parameters divided among a few panels.

Overall this is a very simple logbook, without dive-data import/export and logbook printing capabilities.

PLUS: Facebook integration

MINUS: No import/export options, no logbook printing options

WEBSITE: www.diveseven.com

Scuba-Logbook

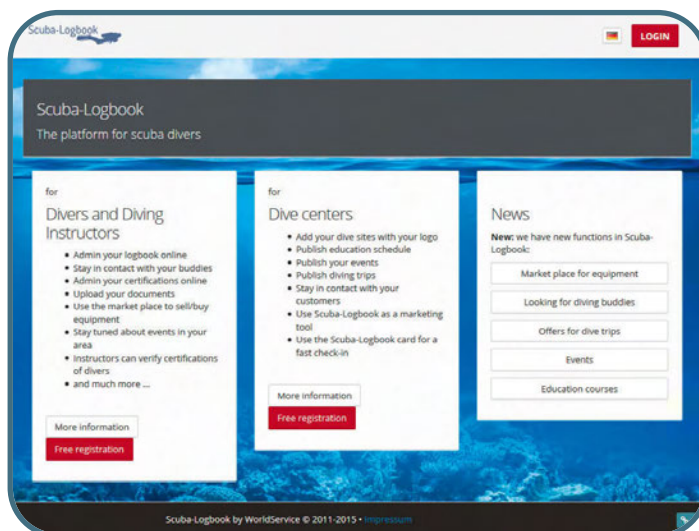
Similar to Diviac, this application provides different registration options for divers, instructors or dive-centres. Unlike Diviac, everything here is free.

Registering took me through the usual three or four fields, with basic data plus an activation email.

Once logged in, I added a dive to the logbook. I found the forms quite old-styled and definitely less appealing than Diviac or Diveboard – all those fields to fill in without any graphical data input as in the previous sites.

An equipment list is also available. The data insertion is very similar to the dive insertion and it didn't look very user-friendly.

This is the only site here that for the first few days sends emails containing tips. So I learned that I could add my certifications and ask an instructor or a buddy to confirm them. In the same way I could add a dive and ask for



confirmation.

There is also a marketplace and a buddy invite/ search section if you're looking for new diving partners or organising a dive trip – great options.

Finally, the user is offered a Scuba-Logbook card. This is a shortcut to the diver documents and history on the site.

By typing the ID number or using the card's QR code,

all verified information such as certificates and documents and the last 10 dives will be displayed.

What about data import/export or logbook printing? I didn't find any sign of either – pity.

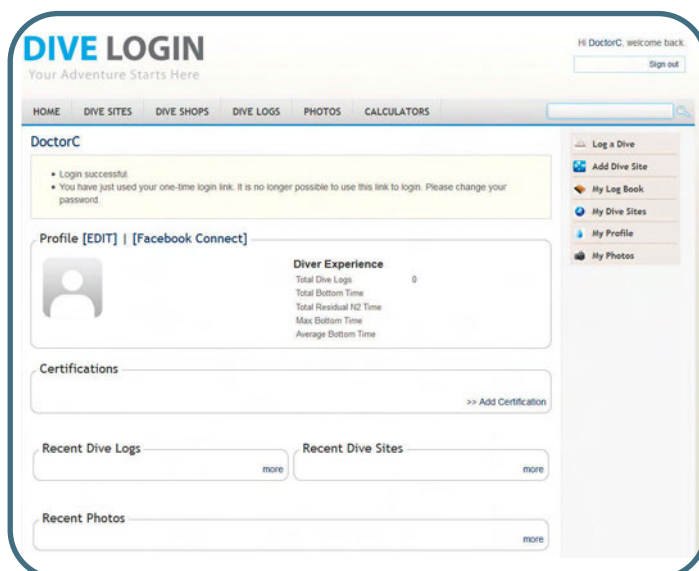
PLUS: Buddy/instructor certification, community interaction, Scuba-Logbook card

MINUS: Data input, lack of data import/ export, no logbook printing

WEBSITE: www.scubalogbook.com

Dive Login

The landing page is a bit old-fashioned, and less appealing than Diviac or



DiveLogs.

Registering is very easy, with just a username and email fields to fill in. By clicking the link in the confirmation email the profile page opens, and this is required to change the user password.

Adding a dive to the logbook is again divided into steps. The first step shows a world map with a list of diving spots from which to choose. A little overwhelming – but there is an optional button to skip this step.

The second step contains all the dive data. Unfortunately the dive-site can be chosen only from the map on the previous step, or from a huge drop-down list that is noticeably incomplete.

A mixture of type-in fields and radio buttons with icons is used to insert the dive data.

There is also a section with a dive verification where it is possible to insert

buddy data, but there is no buddy verification, as in other loggers. Once saved, the data is presented in a simple, clear form.

I quickly found out how I could print my logbook. A side-panel even shows a list of printing options for logbook customisation – impressive!

But here again, I didn't find any possibility of dive-data import/export.

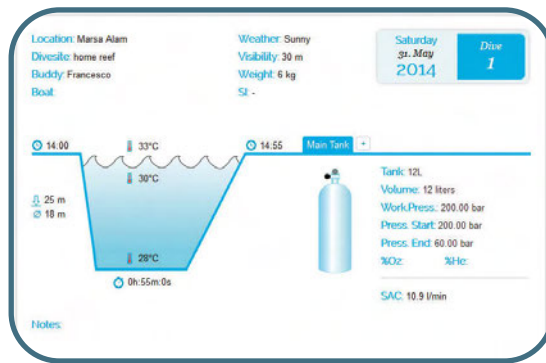
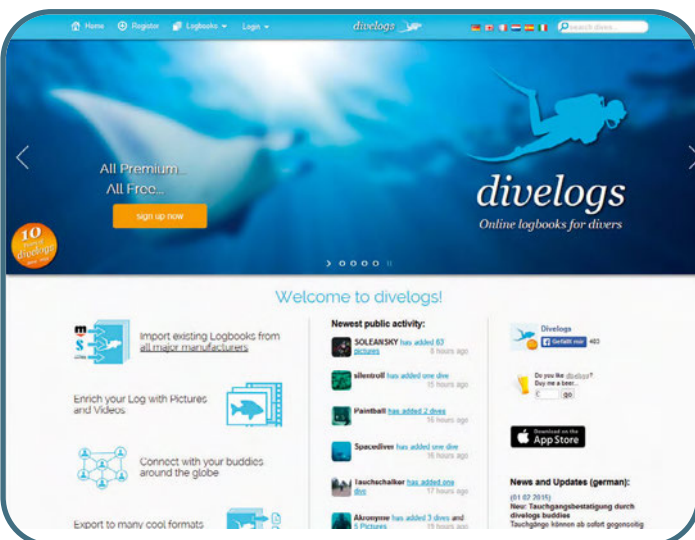
PLUS: Logbook printing

MINUS: Old-fashioned, no data import/export, somewhat unpleasant to use

WEBSITE: www.diveinlog.com

DiveLogs.de

DiveLogs.de introduces itself with a very attractive landing page that promises quite a lot.



Registration is very fast, and after confirmation through a verification email, I was able to login. First impressions are very good. The site is well-designed

and modern. Clicking on my username tab opens a long drop-down menu.

The number of options may seem a bit daunting but they are well thought-through, though I would be inclined to change the list order – putting "New Dive" at the top, for example.

I started by adding some information in My User Profile: a picture, a few words about me, my equipment, my certifications – easy.

Adding dives to the logbook is again fast and straightforward. A cool feature is the possibility to pin your dive-spot on Google Maps. Later you can search your dives by location, and you can even export dives to Google Earth.

After saving the dive data I was asked if I would like to add images or videos, which is just a drag-and-drop operation. Great! Finally, I was presented with a graphical representation of my dive.

Your buddy can verify every dive, if he/she is registered in DiveLogs.de.

Where

DiveLogs.de excels is in its import/export and printing capabilities. It provides a full

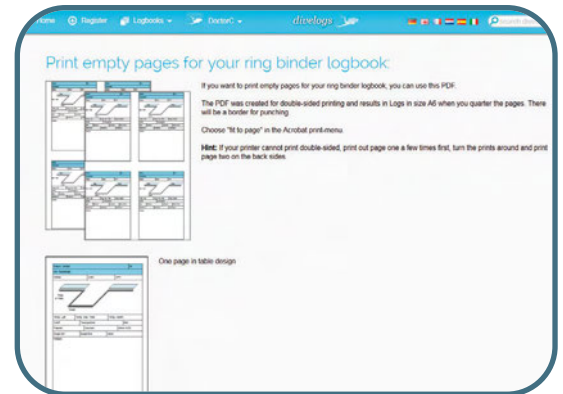
range of export options: PDF; eBook with or without images from your dives in epub format; Google Earth; Excel; UDCF; or DLD (website proprietary format). So it's not just paper prints! Epub format is great if you want to carry your logbook in your smart device.

The data import feature is just wonderful. The list of available formats is really long and complete.

PLUS: Huge import/export data formats, logbook printing, appealing graphics, buddy dive verification

MINUS: Hmm – nothing!

WEBSITE: diveinlog.de



My Verdict

After playing around these sites for a while, I came up with the following podium classification:

Third place goes to **Diviac**, mainly because of the logbook printing paid options. This is a great site with appealing graphics, but other sites are offering the same for free.

On the second step of my podium goes **Diveboard.com**, with its easy navigation and Facebook integration.

It didn't make the top because of the limited data import and the lack

of logbook-printing possibilities.

And the winner is **DiveLogs.de**. It made a great overall impression, and the right combination of colours and graphics made it a very pleasant user experience.

What really made it stand out is the huge data import and the perfect logbook export/ printing options.

A special mention goes to **Scuba-Logbook** – appealing layout, email tips, buddy confirmation and diver community give it great potential.

It needs only to improve the input forms and data import/ export options.



0m



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TREWAVAS



GOING UNDERGROUND

THE POND IN FRONT OF ME IS LIKE A MIRROR; a reflective eye that gazes up through the heart of the jungle. It looks shallow, too shallow for a diver in a heavy twin-set to stride into.

But this is a deception. This Mexican *cenote* is part of a massive network of underground rivers. And I jump.

Now cave-diving isn't everybody's cup of tea. Once you've strayed beyond any sight of natural light, enclosed by rock, you're as vulnerable as you're ever likely to be.

A cave is no respecter of diving experience or qualifications. The rocks are not impressed and the darkness is unforgiving.

For many open-water divers, the allure of a cave is incomprehensible. I turn on my primary light and swim into the blackness.

Earlier this year, after a long illness, my Dad died. I felt as if somebody had punched a hole right through me. The world carries on, but I'm left shaken and a bit lost. I might look the same, but something is missing. Who am I now?

My grief is big and small. I can, regretfully, accept the bigger fact that my Dad has gone. It's the small and unexpected details that stab at my heart: coming across a forgotten snap of him on my phone, or seeing his favourite dish on a menu.

It's almost 15 years since I last dived in this cave. My safety drills are pretty rusty, but here I am.

Steven Gerrard, the cave-diver and explorer who is the world authority on the *cenotes* of Yucatan, has kindly introduced me to Michel Vasquez.

It takes a high level of confidence and competence to be able to take a diver with whom you have no experience of diving into the cave environment. I quickly realise that I've struck lucky with Michel. He is a treasure.

I'm swimming through the darkness, keeping my eye on the yellow-coloured "gold line" that threads through this cave system. It's this line that shows the route in, and out.

Even if you lost all your lights or the vis was stirred up and destroyed, you should be able to feel your way out by using this line. It's literally a life-line.

And getting lost is what kills most cave-divers. If you fail to pay attention, swim off and lose that line, it can easily be Game Over.

If you ignore the line protocols and end up swimming your way into the cave rather than out, then you've had it.

In cave-diving, it's the small details that can really hurt you.

So what, you may wonder, do you find in a cave that would justify taking these risks? Gold and treasure?

The further I swim into the cave, the longer it takes to swim back out. Staying calm, being disciplined and focused, remembering the skills – these experiences make me feel strong and alive; they fill up my heart.

There's always something a little bit magical about returning to the cavern zone after the darkness of the cave. There's something joyful about the quality of the light that plays onto the rocks and beckons you out, back into an environment full of life and colour and sunshine.

As I leave the cave, I'm happy; I'm certain of who I am. I'm somebody who dives in caves.

**SWIM OFF AND
LOSE THAT LINE,
IT CAN EASILY BE
GAME OVER**

LOUISE TREWAVAS

JELLY JUNKET

THE MOST COMMON REACTION for divers on seeing jellyfish under water is to avoid them. Some species have tentacles with a painful sting, and some are almost impossible to avoid, being tiny and transparent, but if you swim into them they will leave you with an annoying itch as if you have been attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes.

An exception is the mosaic jellyfish (*Thysanostoma thysanura*), which is very large and beautiful.

These jellies are normally found in open ocean, most of the time close to the surface. We encounter them often when the currents carry them over or past the reefs on which we dive.

I worked during the diving season (October to May) as the pro photographer for Similan Diving Safaris in Thailand, diving almost every day in the Similan and Surin National Parks and Richelieu Rock.

This gave me a great opportunity to see these beautiful jellyfish through a large part of their life-cycle.

While alive they are often accompanied by small fish – often juvenile trevallies. They hang out with the jellyfish because it provides them with protection – if predator fish such as mackerel come along, they can hide under the jellyfish's skirt, with the tentacles protecting them from their predators.

Eventually the jellies die, and that's when the real action starts, as it is a feast time for a variety of creatures.

Rabbitfish are the main species to feed on them, always feeding from underneath. Butterflyfish and bannerfish also take advantage of this food source, though they often have a hard time competing with the rabbitfish.

On one occasion we were lucky enough to see a big green turtle eating a very big jelly. It bit off chunks of the dying jellyfish and swallowed them, and it took almost an hour for it to devour the jelly until there was nothing left but the top of the "bell", which it left behind.

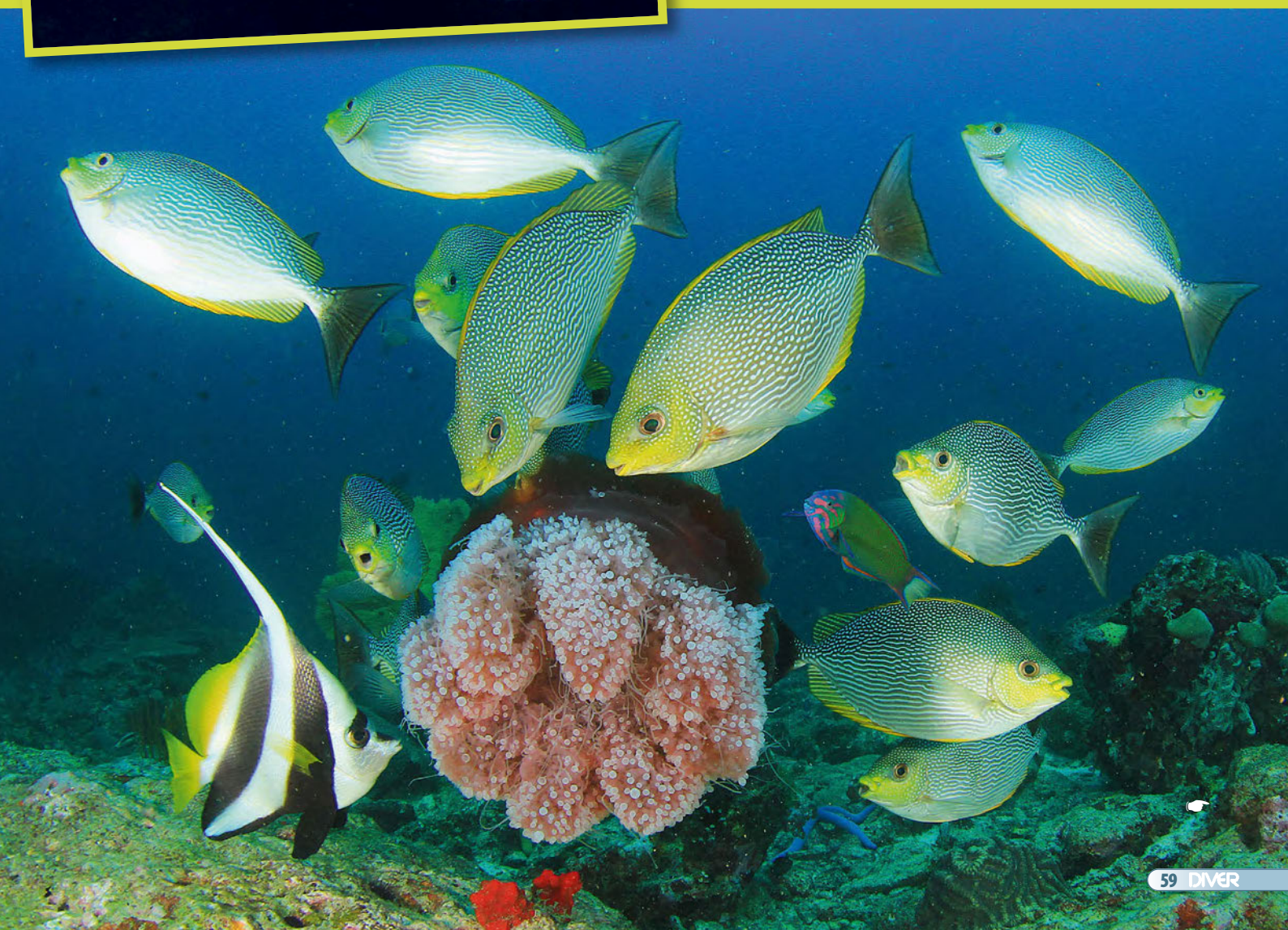
The turtle was eating it just below the surface, just a metre or two under water. The jelly would keep sinking, so the turtle would pull it back up towards the surface so that whenever the turtle went up for air it could get back to its meal quickly before other fish got hold of it. My series of photos follow the action.

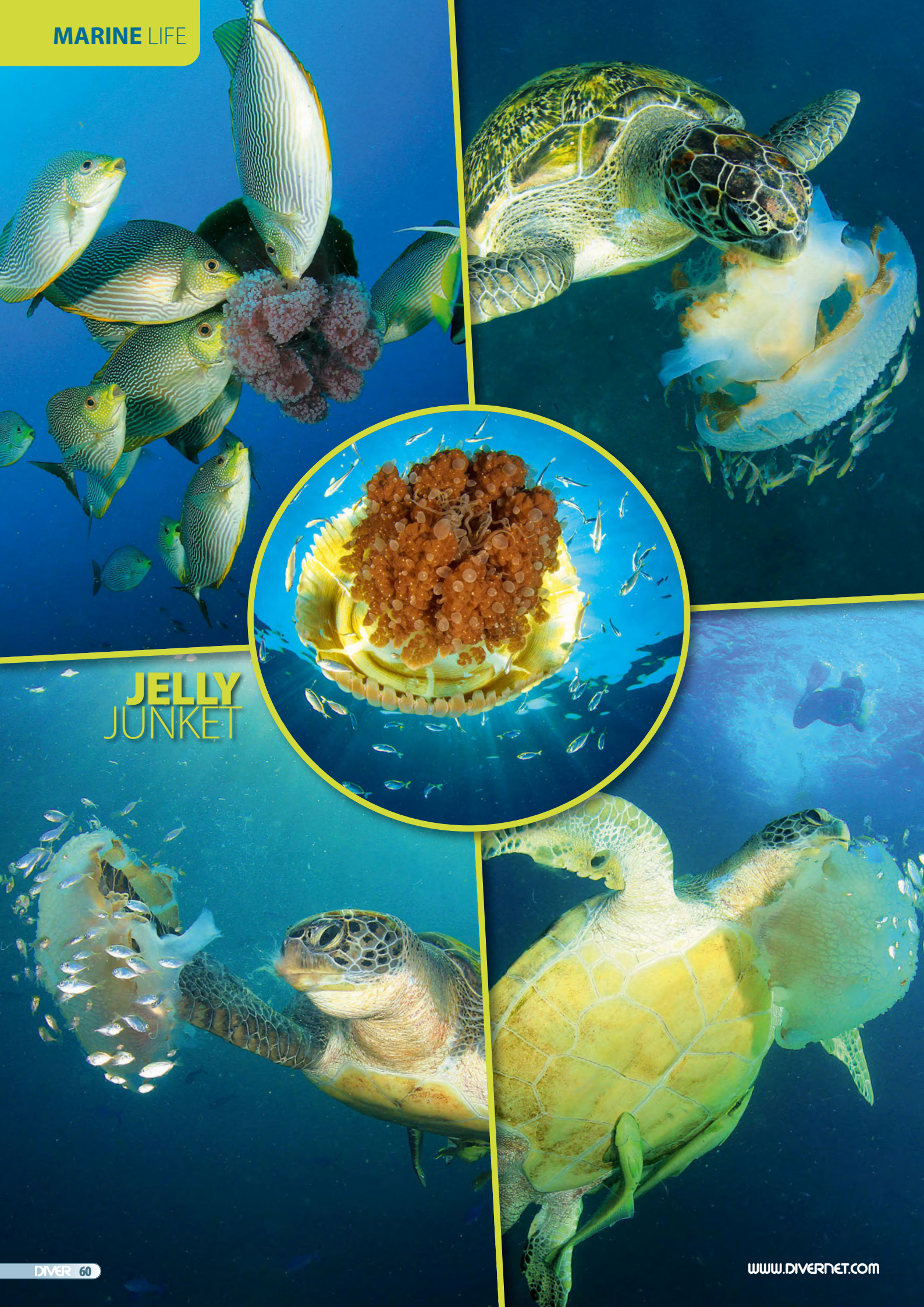
When the beautiful *Thysanostoma thysanura* passes on, voracious gourmets rush in to dispose of the body.



RICHARD CAREY was on standby with his camera







JELLY JUNKET



Monthly HALLS

'HE WAS THE CLUB PERSON WE SECRETLY ASPIRE TO BE'

A FEW COLUMNS BACK, I wondered why we didn't have a divers' eulogy, a prayer or a poem to send us on our way at the end of our days.

The response to this particular column was rather wonderful, with poems, musings, prose and some beautiful thoughts put down on paper or on email and sent my way.

I wasn't quite sure what to do next, because the submissions were so very personal to the people who had written them that I didn't want to declare a "winner".

I also didn't think that I'd be reading through them again so quickly after the initial idea, hopelessly looking for the words to mourn someone so universally loved by the diving community.

Andy Moll failed to surface after a wreck dive near Swanage on 24 May this year.

He was missing for some time, and thankfully his body has now been recovered, so those close to him have some sort of closure – a dreadful word, because I can't begin to imagine how "closure" even comes into it when you lose such a dedicated family man as Andy, husband to Elaine and dad to four terrific girls.

I MET ANDY ONLY a few times – more of that in a moment – but knew of him more by reputation than anything. Isn't it unusual in our sport – riven as it can be by individual animosity, inter-club, and inter-agency emotions – to hear someone spoken of as a genuinely, completely, universally loved figure?

He was a very active character in diving, was Andy, a proper hands-on

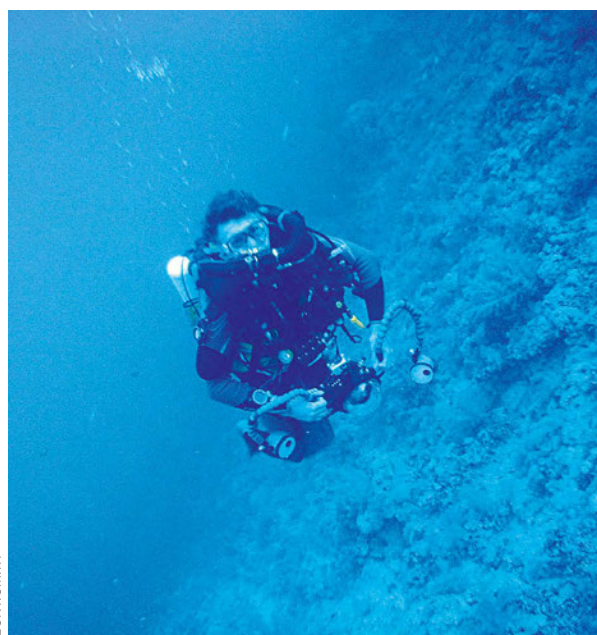
enthusiast who not only developed and worked on his own diving skills, but had also served nationally with the British Sub-Aqua Club and had scaled the giddy heights as an instructor-trainer.

HE WAS A MEMBER of Severnside Sub Aqua Club, and a full-on club-man if there ever was one.

The real heroes of diving – I've said it before and I'll say it again – are not those who go deepest and sport decals on their sleeves like deranged boy scouts; they are the ones who quietly make the system work.

They are Andy Moll. Booking boats, towing RIBs, filling cylinders, training newcomers, putting out chairs, washing glasses, rigging tents, fixing kit, giving lectures, making tea and oiling the

Below: Andy Moll on a Severnside Sub-Aqua Club liveaboard trip to the Red Sea last October.



LEON R SMITH

wheels. Andy did so with a broad smile throughout, eternally genial and enthusiastic, like a man living his dream.

I first met him in the Outer Hebrides, where he had towed the club RIB for a dive or two with some grey seals (Severnside to North Uist – not a bad old effort that, Andy).

He looked like a 10-year-old kid, beaming and ruddy-cheeked, as if he couldn't quite believe that he was allowed to play with boats, engines and dive-kit.

This completely ignored the point obvious to the rest of us, that without Andy none of it would have happened.

I MET HIM SEVERAL TIMES after that at diving events. He entered into the spirit of them all with a terrific sense of gusto, and his fancy dress became the stuff of legend.

I still bear the psychological scars of the Lara Croft outfit – the snag being that try as you might you can never quite "un-see" things. It's seared on my retina for ever.

Diving gave a great deal to Andy, but he gave a heck of a lot more back. We as a sport are richer for his presence and his contribution. He epitomised the unselfish spirit that is the very best of British diving – he was the club person we all secretly aspire to be.

It is said that none of us can choose the length of our life, but we can all choose the depth – a fitting maxim by which any diver should live their life. Andy Moll's life had real depth.

Of all the wonderful entries to the requests for eulogies, perhaps this one sums it all up. Gratitude to Richard Garnett for sending it in:

Where Corals Lie

*The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spray
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.*

*By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where corals lie.*

*Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
But far the rapid fancies fly
To rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the lands where corals lie.*

*Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the lands where corals lie.*

So, Andy, thanks for all you did for us. You will be terribly missed, big man.

WEDDING CELEBRATIONS



For her first ever foray into Caribbean diving, **MELISSA HOBSON** would have preferred to have free rein over her diving schedule. However, being forced to find other activities than the renowned, *Kittiwake* wreck opened up a range of breath-taking alternatives... not all of them diving!

Above: A big Caymans turtle.

Above centre: In a kayak ready to paddle to Bioluminescence Bay.

Far right: Enjoying the Cayman Islands' famously clear water.

Right: Sting ray snogged for luck – really?

HALFWAY ACROSS THE WORLD and well out of my price range, I have to say that the Cayman Islands was not my first choice of destination for a week in the sun.

But because a family wedding was taking me to the largest of the islands, Grand Cayman, I had to make the most of what it had to offer – both above and below the ocean's surface.

A little research quickly enabled me to narrow down the unmissable dives around Grand Cayman, but I was equally quickly disappointed by diary clashes between my other organised activities and my dive-shop's schedule.

Apparently, being bridesmaid at my brother's wedding took priority over diving the renowned *Kittiwake* wreck

(Tuesday) and I couldn't miss my flight home (Thursday), even if it was to experience Ocean Frontier's X-Dive – a one-of-a-kind dive along the Cayman Trench which, reportedly, gives you the greatest chances of seeing sharks and "the big stuff".

Although disappointing, with 365 officially named dive sites in the Cayman Islands (240 of those around Grand Cayman), I hoped I'd find plenty of other dives worthy of note.

FOR OUR FIRST DAY on the island we had chartered a boat to take the wedding party to famed Stingray City. This is supposedly "the world's best 12ft dive" but, rather than donning tanks, we were there to meet these gentle creatures on

foot, standing waist-deep in the water.

The area of shallow sandbars that is now a legendary tourist attraction was once just a place where fishermen cleaned their catch. The usually shy sting rays began gathering to feed on the fish-guts, and were soon associating the sound of a boat-engine with food.

Decades later, tourists can experience not merely seeing but getting up close to these impressive creatures.

As we waded through the water, large rays began gathering around us, clearly aware that they might be in for a feed.

They circled us and brushed against our legs, and we were encouraged to hold them and, rather bizarrely, to give them a kiss in return for seven years' good luck.

Despite being someone who usually



STEVEN CLARKE

loves big-animal encounters on a dive, sliding my arms beneath these huge, surprisingly heavy creatures was mildly terrifying.

Not to mention puckering up for a smooch with one.

When the guides pulled out some squid for feeding time, the rays went berserk, like a gang of kids fighting for sweets.

I decided to watch the frenzy from the safety of the boat, away from the risk of being accidentally spiked by one of the multiple barbs.

For the rest of the day we cruised across the impossibly blue Caribbean Sea and, using only our snorkels, saw amazing coral, multitudes



JASON HARRY

L. HATCHER

of rainbow-coloured fish and numerous rays gliding about beneath us.

The next day would give me my first taste of Caymans diving, and I had high hopes as I drove along the coastal road towards Ocean Frontiers' dive-shop.

After a short boat-ride, we began to kit up for our first dive at Turtle Pass, one of 12 sites on the three-mile stretch of reefs and walls called Queen's Highway.

The first thing that struck me about Cayman Islands diving – before I'd so much as rinsed my mask in the warm, azure water – was how confusing it is for a British diver.



Above: Checking out lunch – diver with a lionfish...

Right: ...Lunch.

The boat was packed with Americans, I and a couple of the crew being English exceptions, so the briefing was all in feet, pounds and psi. Reassured by a mini "translation" briefing to the metres, kilos and bar I'm used to, I was more confident as I made my giant stride off the boat that I'd be able to tell if I was low on air (750psi is roughly 50 bar if you're as clueless as I am on conversions).

At Turtle Pass, we were told, we had a 100% chance of either seeing, or not seeing, a turtle. What? Obviously we were hoping for the former outcome, given this was supposedly one of the top spots

in Cayman for turtle sightings.

Loggerhead, hawksbill and green turtles are all said to frequent this spot regularly, as it is directly offshore from known turtle-nesting sites. This dive-site is renowned for its steep coral wall and the underwater passageway that runs through it.

We descended and entered the narrow swim-through, winding down through the coral wall and getting steadily deeper until we reached the other side.

The tunnel requires good dive skills and, thankfully, our experienced group managed to avoid kicking up the bottom so that those at the back would still enjoy fairly decent visibility.

When we popped out on the other side, we were rewarded with an incredible drop-off and what seemed like endless blue depths below us.

In the crystal water, the exit of the swim-through felt as if it was just a few metres from the surface.

My computer showed 30m, however, and I realised how easy it would be to disregard depth in these impossibly clear waters. A stark reminder of how crucial it is to rely on your equipment rather than your senses.

ONCE OUT OF THE SWIM-THROUGH

we turned around and the light current offered us an easy drift that guided us gently back to the boat.

After recent dives in South Africa, battling strong current and huge surface swells, such mild conditions were a dream. It was easy to see why many of the divers on my boat returned each year to enjoy these easy conditions.

This would be a great destination for beginner or nervous divers to get used to the underwater world.

For the rest of the dive we swam slowly around the wall and back to the boat, admiring the bright coral, sponges and gorgonians on the reef.

We also examined the insides of the giant barrel sponges for macro life. The sharp-eyed were rewarded with sightings of colourful flamingo tongue snails, their clearly outlined spots evoking a Roy Lichtenstein pop-art painting.

The visibility was unlike anything I'd seen before but, while Stingray City had lived up to its name, no turtle passed us at Turtle Pass. Only on our next dive at Fish Tank did an inquisitive hawksbill decide to swim alongside us for a few minutes.

The 30m vis was a blessing, as we easily spotted the inquisitive turtle from several metres away and were able to wait as it approached us curiously.

After checking us out, it decided to swim alongside us for a few minutes before darting off into the blue.

The clear water also gave our buddy-



pairs freedom to venture further from the group than might normally be possible as we explored the reef.

Despite the extensive visibility, I was slightly surprised by how few fish we saw here. I'd been expecting Caribbean diving to be full of multitudes of colourful fish as far as the eye could see.

IT WAS EASY TO SEE why it was our next dive-site Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mo, rather than Fish Tank, that was my instructor Kev's favourite.

Here, the water was so clear it seemed you could see for miles across a seascape of rolling hills, coral walls and canyons.

This clarity made it easy to spot the most abundant form of life visible on this dive – lionfish. Just as well, because the intention was to hunt and cull them.

The Indo-Pacific red lionfish spread outside its usual territory and into the Caribbean, where it has become a pest. To protect its reef, the Caymans government





introduced a licensing programme for people to cull lionfish from the island's marine parks. Several dive-schools now offer lionfish hunts in which divers help the licensed cullers to spot the fish.

My dive instructor described the lionfish as "the cockroach of the sea". If it seems peculiar to compare these beautiful creatures with their decorative striped fins to that ugly insect, what's indisputable is their resilience.

Like cockroaches, they have the ability to survive in almost any conditions. Similarly to bull sharks, they can even survive in both salt and fresh water.

They're spreading like wildfire and eating everything else in sight, so their population has to be kept under control.

Being the top predator also means that they paid no attention to us as we spotted the distinctive dorsal fins and Kev swam up very close and cocked his spear.

In the blink of an eye he stabbed the fish with a quick, clean motion and disposed of it in his containment barrel.

I watched from a distance, away from the lionfish's venomous dorsal and anal

fins. The poison is similar to that in a bee sting and the affected area can swell up for around three weeks. Ouch!

After 45 minutes we returned to the boat with our catch. Although some divers have been known to feed other fish with the remains, this is frowned on as it can change the behaviour of those fish.

On the west side of the island, divers noticed an increase in the number of free-swimming moray eels; elsewhere, cullers found grouper following them like dogs begging for treats. Even sharks started to recognise the association between divers and a free feed.

So the team bring their catch back to their bar, Eagle Rays, to be made into a tasty treat for hungry divers.

I had worked up an appetite and was intrigued to learn what lionfish would taste like, so went along for a taste. Speared before my eyes just an hour ago, it couldn't have been much fresher.

I'd been told that the meat can be fairly bland, but pan-fried in light Cajun spices and piled into soft tacos with salad, sweet chili, mayo and a squeeze of lemon, it was delicious.

THE FINAL ACTIVITY of our Caymans trip (apart from the wedding itself), was a night-time bioluminescent kayaking tour.

Under an awesome starry sky, we made our way quietly out from Rum Point into the darkness of the bay, where our guide told us to take our paddles and stir up the sand beneath us. Puzzled, we prodded at the murk below.

As we did so, the sand began to sparkle as if we'd uncovered a layer of diamonds. These are known as "disco crabs" by the kayaking guides.

As soon as we stopped prodding at the bottom the glitter "disco" faded and we began to make our way towards the real reason for our trip – the rare and secluded Bioluminescence Bay.

We didn't notice at first that, as we moved into the bay, our paddle-strokes were becoming more obvious, as if bubbles were coming off the blade as it moved through the dark water.

As we glided further into the centre of the bay and away from the open ocean, the faint greenish "bubbles" – which were in fact plankton – slowly grew brighter.

Like fireflies, these microscopic organisms (a type of dinoflagellate called *Pyrodinium bahamense*) can create and emit their own light energy, so they can glow in total darkness if touched by or interacting with anything else in the water.

It looks like magic, but this is actually a clever form of predator avoidance. To stop fish eating them, each organism will light up the water around 100 times their normal size in the hope of attracting a larger fish to eat its attacker.

So as our paddles interacted with these tiny organisms, bright phosphorescent swirls erupted through the darkness.

We dipped our fingers into the water, and before long were reaching in with our whole arms to watch the incredible effect.

By this point the bioluminescence was practically neon against the black water. Scooping up water that sparkled like fairy dust in our palms, we scattered the glitter and watched the shimmering ripples it made against the darkness as it splashed across the bay.

Within the bay, there are up to a million of these magical organisms per gallon of



L.HATCHER

FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ BA flies to Grand Cayman from London Heathrow.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Ocean Frontiers specialises in diving Grand Cayman's East End and offers Dive & Stay holiday packages for three, five or seven nights or customised packages to take in special requests, oceanfrontiers.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ The dry season from November to April is best. Hurricane season lasts from June to November.

MONEY ▶ Cayman Islands dollar.

PRICES ▶ BA return flights from £780. From 22 August until late September Ocean Frontiers is offering seven nights in a condominium at Compass Point Dive Resort, six days of two-tank dives and car hire for US \$1099 per diver. A two-tank dive normally costs \$129. Bioluminescent kayak tours with Cayman Kayaks cost \$59, www.caymankayaks.com

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.caymanislands.co.uk

water, giving an idea of the spectacle you might experience if you went on this trip on a rainy night. By all accounts it's something to behold, as the entire surface of the water glows and swirls in the rain.

Bioluminescence also occurs in the open sea, as night-divers know, but this bay's isolation protects the micro-organisms from being flushed out by wind and tides, making the phenomenon much brighter and more striking there.

It was a magical experience and stole the show, even from the colourful reefs, breathtaking coral walls and spectacular drop-offs on our dives.

Above: Reef scene.

Top centre: Ocean Frontiers dive-boats ready to go.

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BIO ROCK

RAISED UP ON ITS HAUNCHES, teeth bared, shoulders hunched, the massive tiger was ready to pounce. As I looked around me, I felt as if I was in the middle of a surreal dream.

Over there, a trio of bicycles leant against each other; over here was a giant hand giving a peace sign, while the metal springs of a mattress lay on the floor in between. A huge lotus flower, petals unfolded, stood centre-stage, cocooning a sculpture of a beautiful goddess.

All were covered in a coating of brightly coloured corals, many sporting seafans, sponges and groups of fish as decoration.

I was diving the Biorock Park, starting a few metres off the shore of Pemuteran in north-west Bali, Indonesia.

Biorock was first developed by Professor Wolf Hilbertz in 1979. The German marine architect was invited to Bali by Yos Amerta, a Pemuteran dive-centre owner, after he discovered Professor Hilbertz's work on sea walls and thought that it might work as an artificial reef. Taking marine biologist Tom Goreau with him, Wolf paid his first visit to Pemuteran in 2000.

Damage has been caused to coral reefs worldwide by a combination of weather, rising sea temperatures, dynamite and cyanide fishing, building and marine tourism, but attempts were made to build artificial reefs from as early as the 1830s.

This was in South Carolina, where locals experimented with log huts, but the wood rotted and deteriorated before corals could grow on them.

In the 1950s and '60s fishermen tried using concrete blocks, tyres, train carriages, coaches, cars, white goods and even toilets. None of these ideas was particularly successful, and it took a long time for corals to colonise them.

Of course, the original artificial reefs



Biorock Park in north-west Bali is just one

example of what can be done to generate coral growth using electrical currents.

LISA COLLINS enjoys the view





were shipwrecks, which could grow completely unrecognisable over time and seemed to provide the perfect basis for coral growth.

Many decommissioned vessels are sunk as artificial reef systems, but they have to be located in a area suitable to take a huge structure, and where they won't damage any existing reefs.

Although fish may start moving into their new home almost immediately, it actually takes three to five years for a wreck to be colonised sufficiently by corals and plants to sustain and support a whole wealth of marine species in the same way as a natural reef.

To not only regenerate reefs close to shore but to increase the breeding and spawning grounds of reef fish in protected waters, something else needed to be done.

WOLF HILBERTZ HAD pioneered a technique of passing electrical currents through salt water. Back in 1974 he found that saltwater minerals would slowly form around an electrode, coating it with a material as strong as concrete.

As long as the current flowed, the structure would continue to grow larger and stronger – at a rate of 5cm per year. It would also be able to regenerate and heal itself if damaged.

Calling this process “accretion”, Hilbertz used the technology in developing countries to grow low-cost sea-walls in the ocean by applying electrical current to submerged conductive structures.

After meeting Tom Goreau, the two began thinking about how the technique might be applied to coral reefs.

They started by using steel reinforcing bars, which were cheap, easy to weld and found everywhere. Simple structures were sunk and anchored in 3-5m. Thick steel-mesh wire later became another biorock structural material.

Two 12V power cables were attached, one connected to a power supply (positive pole) and the other to the structure

(negative pole). Electrochemical reactions raised the pH level around the metal and the mineral accretion would start forming within 48 hours. Broken live corals were then tied to the structure.

After three months, the corals were naturally attaching themselves to the structures and growing.

At first, the success rate was only 40%, because those tasked with attaching the corals were either not doing it properly or using dead corals. After extensive training of a small group of locals, however, the success rate in Pemuteran has now reached 75%.

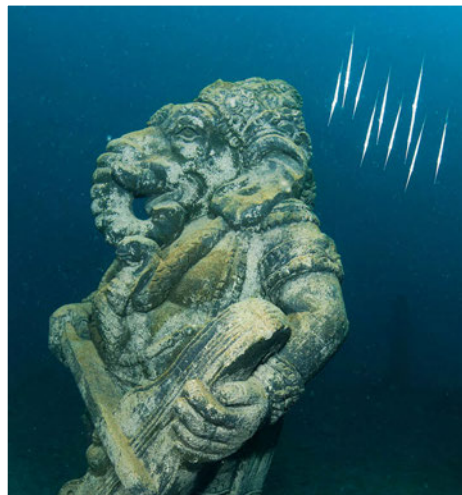
Marine biologists who study the reef regularly have found that the corals grow faster, are stronger, more brightly coloured and have more marine life than natural reefs. It's a bit like a bionic reef!

Since 2000 more than 70 structures have been sunk off the beach in Pemuteran. Most are very healthy and sport a multitude of different skeleton-building hard corals. Soft corals and sponges are mostly “gardened” off the structures, as they are much faster-growing than hard corals and block the slower-growing but more important reef-building hard corals.

Once the reef has built up sufficiently, the soft corals, seafans and sponges are allowed to grow. As the calcium carbonate coating the structures is so similar to the natural reef substrate, corals freely take to the biorock.

Most of the early structures were either arches or tunnels. A bare mattress was anchored down to see how the coral would take to it, but was the one structure that didn't work too well, probably because the springs were too tightly packed to allow enough coral to gain a foothold. Being closer to the seabed than the other structures, the flow of nutrients would not have fed the coral as effectively.

Biorock structures can be built in any shape or size. Using common construction reinforcing bars or wire mesh, they can be made very simply by





unskilled locals with welding equipment.

Such techniques suit third-world or remote sites, where the reefs have been damaged, especially by destructive fishing methods. Villages can increase eco-tourism and thus income by building artificial reefs, and become less reliant on fishing.

WHEN TOM AND WOLF made their first structures in Pemuteran, the power cables would keep disconnecting in big storms because of wave movement.

They also found that triggerfish liked to bite the cables. But by getting the whole community involved in helping to nurture and care for these reefs, the main industry of Pemuteran has shifted from fishing to eco-tourism. The community has gone on to win many international awards and prizes, including the United Nations Equator Prize 2012.

Some of the oldest structures have now been taken off the electrical currents, as their reef skeleton is deemed strong enough to support itself. A lot of the original power cables are nearly



completely covered in coral growth too.

A beautiful goddess sitting in a giant lotus leaf is the first structure to run on solar power, and more structures are being planned to be supplied in this way.

The cost of keeping an almost-constant power supply (it is shut off for several hours a day to save on electricity) is shared between all the hotels and dive centres in Pemuteran, although Bali Dive

Left: Villager statue.

Clockwise from top left: Handy viewing bench; starry pufferfish next to pillar; featherstar 'pigtailed'; newly discovered and unnamed garden eel; Denise pygmy seahorse at Temple Wall; coral-covered head; razorfish around Ganesha statue.

Academy is the overseer.

Unfortunately there is no government funding, so an "adopt a baby coral" scheme was founded to help pay for the four regular staff who look after the biorock. Visitors can also pay to have their name made out of wire and attached to one of the structures.

Although Pemuteran was the first place to have biorock structures, I had





Pictured: Bali Dive Academy's RIB.
Left: Diver swimming over Temple Wall.
Below: Diver and seafan-covered head.

come across several before my visit there this year. In Lembah Strait in North Sulawesi, Lembah Resort has built its own structures. Though not as thickly covered in hard coral, because the electrical current was supplied only for a short period and soft coral flourishes on the structures, there are clear signs of a healthy eco-system where none would otherwise have existed.

In Gangga Island near Bunaken, also in North Sulawesi, several structures had been built which, again, showed a very healthy eco-system, although not as much coral growth or marine-life as Pemuteran.

Indonesia has the most biorock projects, in at least six locations, including the two largest reef-restoration projects in the world – in Pemuteran and the Gili Islands off Lombok.

Other projects exist in more than 20 countries, including the Maldives, Caribbean, Seychelles, the Philippines and Thailand. I saw the project in the latter country's Koh Tao located at Japanese Gardens back in 2012. In conjunction with Save Koh Tao, Big Blue Dive Centre and a consortium of other dive-schools launched their biorock project in 2006, and it was so successful that a newer and larger biorock structure was installed in 2008.

For Koh Tao, an island visited by tens of thousands of divers every year but with only a few dive-sites, this was particularly helpful, because it meant creating a new dive-site.

The mesh-like make-up of the structures makes them particularly suitable for storm-ravaged reefs, such as in the Caribbean. In Grand Turk in the

Turks & Caicos Islands, two projects were initiated in the shallows at around 5-6m in 2006. Each project had more than 1200 corals transplanted onto it – coral growth was healthy and marine-life became abundant on the structures.

Then two major hurricanes hit the island. Hurricane Ike, the most powerful on record to hit Grand Turk, followed very quickly in the wake of Hanna.

It caused a third of the corals to be lost, and some of the cables to be displaced, but in general the artificial reef survived better than the natural reef.

SWIMMING AROUND the beautiful and photogenic structures in Pemuteran, I not only saw surreal-looking biorock, but


ones shaped like a manta, a nudibranch, a snail, a seahorse and a dolphin.

One of the newest structures was a large wave with a sperm whale riding it, installed only a few weeks earlier. Already a large grouper had found a home in the barrel of the wave.

A large school of snapper floated above

a structure in the shape of a temple roof, set below a swim platform located above the centre of the dive-site for snorkellers to enjoy.

I snorkelled and dived this site many times over the week I stayed in Pemuteran. Each time I discovered something new, or found a different angle from which to look at the structures.

Seeing new life growing so encouragingly and strongly made me revel in the beauty and magnificence of the undersea world. 

*** For more on biorock and the locations of its projects, go to www.biorock.net**

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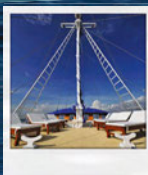


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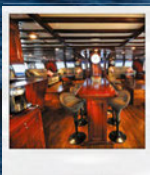
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Ultimate Diving is offering a cool £950pp off the price of a *Galapagos Aggressor* trip around the Pacific hotspot on 17 December this year, that cash coming off a usual price of £3655. Quite a Christmas gift, as the Galapagos Islands are such a bucket-list destination.

Close your eyes if you will and imagine, as the tour operator suggests, "a dive holiday involving sea-lions, penguins, eagle rays, Galapagos sharks, turtles, hammerheads, iguanas, golden rays, seals and whale sharks..."

From one classic dive destination to another: as announced in *Booking Now* last month, Worldwide Dive and Sail is replacing its defunct *Truk Siren* with *Truk Master* (main picture) from February 2016, although no



prices were then available.

Ultimate Diving is offering seven nights' wreck-diving from this

liveaboard from £2049pp including transfers.

Readers can claim a more-modest

£100 discount by quoting "Truk Master with Ultimate Diving."

► www.ultimatediving.co.uk

Dive Malta – at the controls of a sub!

Here's something very different in terms of diving – the chance to learn to pilot a submarine and explore the depths of the Mediterranean off Malta without getting wet.

Waterproof Expeditions, often associated with coldwater diving adventures, has got together with U-Boat Worx to offer the rare chance for private individuals to become sub pilots.

Courses take place this August and no previous experience is necessary, as U-Boat Worx' instructors will provide the training aboard an air-conditioned C-Explorer 3, described as "the world's most advanced personal submersible", and offering a 360° view through its acrylic sphere.

A 30m yacht will support the programme and take the pilots to "all the best dive-sites".

A two-day introductory course can be followed by an "in-depth" four-day Supervised Pilot Licence course or even a full commercial course if required.

Courses are designed to give participants "as many hours of piloting as possible", says Waterproof, and prices start at 4175 euros per person

► www.waterproof-expeditions.com

REGALDIVE ADDS THE BAHAMAS

Regaldive has expanded its dive portfolio with the introduction of the Bahamas, the 700 Atlantic islands often associated with close encounters with sharks but also offering a wide range of caves, blue holes, coral reefs, deep walls and wrecks.

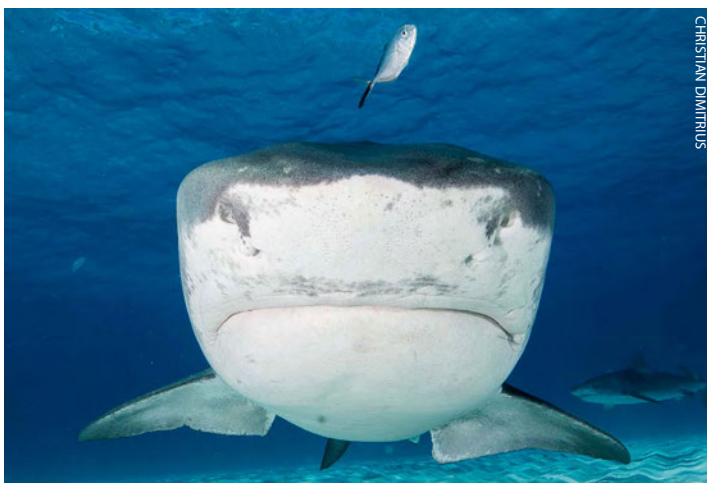
Regaldive's partner in Nassau is Stuart Cove, with a choice of three accommodation options. A seven-night package at the Orange Hill Inn starts from £1727pp including BA return flights from

Heathrow, transfers, pool-view room and 10 dives.

Regaldive also offers seven- and 10-night trips on the *Carib Dancer*, which sails out of Nassau to explore

around the West End of Grand Bahama Island and Tiger Beach, considered one of the world's great shark-dive spots.

► www.regaldive.co.uk



CHRISTIAN DIMITRIUS

the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park with up to five dives a day. Seven-night trips start from £972pp (two sharing).

Flights are additional but can be arranged by Regaldive.

You might also consider the special summer trips aboard *Carib Dancer* that visit the remote areas

HANGING WITH LEGENDS

Look out for travel bargains in the Cayman Islands this September, because from the fifth to 3 October its dive industry honours its diving notables with the second annual Legends and Lions event, expanded from a week to a month long.

It says it is offering "value-packed" diving/accommodation travel packages at off-season rates during this traditionally slow time of year for the industry.

One-week packages including seven-nights' accommodation, 12 dives, photo clinic with the option to

submit photos for the final week competition, "scuba social" event, lionfish seminar with dive, treasure hunt, manufacturer's gear demo and, in the final week, the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame induction ceremony, cost from US \$1099pp (two sharing) at Red Sail Sports/Westin Seven Mile Beach Resort and closer to \$1500 at Sunset House or Divetech.

You might just get the chance to take the plunge with a Hall of Fame diver or two amid the festivities.

► www.divecayman.ky

Ireland-Egypt direct

Good news for Irish divers is that Oonasdivers says it can now book direct flights from either Dublin or Belfast Airport to Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt each Thursday. Offers this summer include Sharks Bay Umbi Village from £695pp, exploring classic northern reefs by day-boat. The price includes flights from Dublin, transfers, seven nights' B&B and 10 dives, with free nitrox.

► www.oonasdivers.com

GEEK WEEK IN LEMBEH

Looking well ahead, Divequest has teamed up with photographers Simon Buxton and Serge Abourjeily at NAD Lembeh in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, to offer a Critter Geek Week in the peak of the Lembeh season – 3-10 September 2016.

NAD Lembeh is a resort “set up by photographers for photographers” and has access to more than 60 dive-sites. For “just a small fraction more than the cost of a normal stay at NAD”, Divequest says you will get in-house workshops, a welcome dinner, guided tuition, a Critter ID quiz night and a one-guide-to-two-divers ratio, on top of seven nights’ full-board in an ocean-front room (two sharing), 17 boat-dives on air and transfers from Manado. That comes to £822pp. Divequest can arrange international flights as required.

► divequest-diving-holidays.co.uk



STEVE WEINMAN

Congers of Connemara



1-6 September are the dates for a Great Escapes camping/dive trip to Ireland led by Monty Halls, allowing a

full four days’ diving in Connemara in pursuit of its celebrated congers.

The eel-diving is with local dive centre Scuba West and the trip also includes “seashore safaris” with the marine-biologist expedition leader.

The price of £795pp includes camping, food, air, diving and gift-pack but not travel to the campsite. You must be a PADI Advanced OWD or equivalent with UK experience.

► www.greatescapes.dartmouth.co.uk



Secret Paradise Maldives is offering an eight-day yoga and diving holiday on what it says is one of the most beautiful northern local islands in the Maldives. Guests staying at the Barefoot ECO Hotel on the island of Hanimadhoo in Haa Alif atoll will be shown how yoga can improve their diving and breathing techniques.

Lessons conducted by an international yoga master can be performed by a yogi of any level, it says, while diving is led by a PADI Dive Master or instructor in small groups.

Both hard and soft corals are said to

thrive in the atoll and sharks and manta rays are among attractions that include drifts, wall- and cave-diving, the *Maadhoo* wreck and claimed 30m visibility.

You get return domestic flights to and from capital Male, seven nights’ half-board in a seaside room (two sharing), six dives including kit rental, eight daily yoga sessions, free bicycles and use of a conservation centre with resident marine biologists.

The price is US \$1599 plus taxes and service charge.

► www.secretparadise.mv

ALL BULL AND SAILFINS

Indulge in eight days of bull shark and sailfins (fastest in-water movers in the world) diving next year! Controversial shark expert Dr Erich Ritter is set to

Ritter and learn about their behaviour and to feel comfortable in their presence.

The collaboration marks an

“additional important step towards the conservation of ‘our’ sharks”, according to Markus Fleischmann, CEO & founder of Pro Dive Mexico.

A package costing US \$3299pp includes



present the first 11-day Sharkschool & Sailfish Encounter Riviera Maya with Pro Dive Mexico and WiroDive at the Occidental Allegro Playacar hotel from 15-25 February next year.

In a programme of workshops and dives, participants should get the chance to encounter bull sharks with

transfers between Cancun and Playacar, 10 nights’ all-inclusive accommodation, five days of bull-shark diving with nitrox, six 90-minute seminars from Ritter and three days of sailfish encounters. Flights are not included.

► www.prodivemex.com

DAVY JONES GOING DOWN WELL

Davy Jones Diving, a PADI 5* Dive Centre in Gran Canaria, was recently awarded both a TripAdvisor certificate of excellence and a PADI certificate of recognition for outstanding customer service in the space of a week.

Last year the 17-year-old operation opened its new Casa Limon centre: “We wanted to...

bring to the Canaries the sort of space, facilities and sense of calm relaxation that is found in centres in the Caribbean and Far East,” said owner and chief instructor Brian Goldthorpe.

“We’ve always had one of the best diving spots in the Canaries right on our doorstep – the El Cabron Marine Reserve – where we see

everything from seahorses and brightly coloured nudibranchs up to butterfly rays and the critically endangered angel shark,” he said.

The centre charges 295 euros for 10 dives, and in nearby Arinaga there are self-catering flats for 2-6 people from 47 euros a night.

► www.davyjonesdiving.com



STEVE WEINMAN

WELL AND TRULY TESTED



A video light, an exposure suit and a coldwater reg, all straightforward for tester NIGEL WADE, but would a noiseless way of getting his buddy's attention prove a grabber?

LIGHTS KELDAN VIDEO 8X

NEARLY EVERY MODERN CAMERA you can buy nowadays has video capability, from mobile phones, compacts, micro four thirds and DSLRs and of course dedicated video cameras from action-style GoPros to top-end Red Epic modular cinematic cameras.

No matter which camera system is used, capturing the very best footage under water depends on the quality of light, and it follows that external lighting is deemed essential for a successful outcome.

Swiss light-maker Daniel Keller has made constant underwater video lighting an art-form with his range of compact Keldan lights, and I took a pair of his Video 8Xs to the Caribbean to try out.

The Design

The Keldan Video 8X is powered by a removable 14.4v, 6.2Ah li-ion battery-pack. An eight-segment green LED display on the rear shows the battery state of charge at a glance.

It takes three to four hours to charge the cells from empty, depending on the input voltage and ambient temperature. Once fully charged the battery will give claimed burntimes of between 45 and 170 minutes depending on the power-output setting.

The light source is a latest generation LED with a claimed maximum output of 10,000 lumens, delivered at a colour temperature of 5,000° Kelvin. The light has five power settings ranging from 28 to 105W, and these are accessed via a twist control-ring behind the head of the lamp.

A convex acrylic lens spreads the light evenly over a 110° beam angle under water and softens it, giving extremely smooth speckle and hotspot-free coverage.

The main body is built from marine-grade aluminium alloy and anodised in a purple colour. A transparent plastic, screw-in end-cap gives a clear view of the battery indicators and is double-O-ring-protected, giving the lamp a depth rating to 200m.

The on-off ring is protected from accidental

operation by a locking button that needs to be pressed and moved to allow the ring to turn.

Colour Rendering Index

The science of light is a complicated subject. I really don't understand it, nor do I need to. What I do need to know are the things that affect my photography and video shooting; especially if these can help me improve the outcome. Let me share the few things that I do know.

The quality of light isn't all about brightness; it's also about colour temperature (measured in °Kelvin).

The sun's colour temperature varies throughout the day, month, year and at different locations from between 5000°K and 6000°K. In

the motion-picture world the colour temperature for artificial lighting to mimic daylight is standardised at 5600°K.

The quality of light generated from video and photo lamps can be measured using the Colour Rendering Index (CRI), which indicates a lamp's ability to render colour accurately, with a rating of 100 at the top of the scale.

CRI is actually a measure of the quality of colour light as established by the International Commission on Illumination.

A CRI rating of 82, that of the Keldan Video 8X light, will allow your eyes and cameras to capture colours that are much more accurate than those shot with a rating of, say, 70.

Lights with a rating of 75 and below can produce substantial colour shifts, loss of saturation and resolution.

Under Water

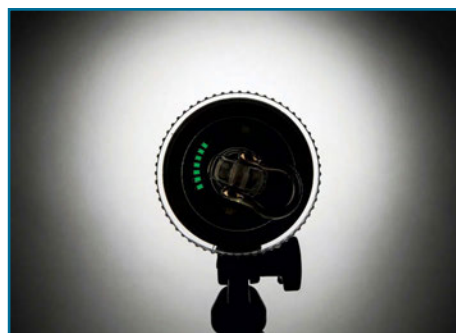
The lamps have clip-on, high-impact polymer mounts with "YS" connection. These allow them to be mounted on a 30cm ball-and-arm system, giving an almost infinite choice of position in relation to the camera's focal plane.

I mounted two lights on my Nikon D800 Subal, set up with a wide-angle 15mm Sigma lens behind an 8in dome-port. I've recently seen some pleasing footage captured using tight macro lenses, but the Holy Grail for me has been beautifully lit wide-angle video, a challenging task for any external lighting combination.



Above: Keldan Video 8X video Light.

Left: The Keldan Video 8X in use under water.



The Video 8X has a smooth spot-free beam that feathers at the edges.

SPECS

PRICE ► £1335, spare battery-pack £285
SIZE ► 23.5 x 7.2cm diameter
WEIGHT ► 0.9kg dry, 0.32kg wet
BATTERY ► 89W, 14.4V, 6.2Ah li-ion
LIGHT FLUX (MAX) ► 10,000 lumens, 4300 candela
LIGHT FLUX (MIN) ► 3200 lumens, 1400 candela
COLOUR TEMPERATURE ► 5000°K, CRI-82
MOUNTS ► Polycarbonate, YS
CONTACT ► www.keldanlights.com
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★★

The first thing I noticed when I powered up the lamps under water was the smooth coverage they delivered. There were no signs of hotspots or poorly lit sections in the central areas, and the edges of the beam gradually faded away to leave an inconspicuous drop-off in illumination.

Twin lamps gave me total coverage of my subjects at a distance of about a metre. This equates to large sections of reef as seen through my 15mm fisheye, all perfectly lit without harsh shadows to reveal sponges, hard and soft corals in their natural vibrant colours.

I found that by reducing the output of the lamp on the opposing side to the sun I could create natural-looking footage. The Keldan 8X's extremely high outputs allowed me to "stop down" my aperture while shooting directly into



The battery meter has eight segmental LED lights.

the sun to prevent that horrible burnt-out and totally clipped white blob, yet I could still perfectly illuminate the subject in the foreground.

I found the burntimes sufficient, with the batteries lasting for two full dives, capturing around 40 minutes of top-quality footage.

The green charge-state indicator LEDs proved to be accurate and a useful tool to assess how much time was left before the batteries needed to be recharged or changed.

The batteries are interchangeable and can be purchased separately, so fully charged spares can be exchanged between dives if the need arises.

Conclusion

My area of expertise lies in underwater stills photography. I'm very new at capturing video – so new, in fact, that I had to do some serious cramming with my camera's instruction manual before this trip to learn how to use the movie functions properly.

The footage I captured isn't going to have the likes of John Boyle or the guys at the BBC Natural History Unit quaking in their boots, but to me it appeared beautifully illuminated with vibrant, natural-looking colours, and without those harsh shadows that can sometimes ruin the effect.



The control ring with five power settings.

Daniel Keller has produced a product that's used by many of the world's professional underwater videographers to bring us the jaw-dropping footage needed to meet our modern entertainment expectations.

Having used them I can see why – they're underwater lighting perfection personified. ■

ALERT SYSTEM BUDDY WATCHER

DON'T YOU JUST HATE DIVING IN A GROUP OF MIXED DIVERS, especially those who seem to think that a small stainless tube with a steel ball that rattles annoyingly when shaken will get the attention of their buddy?

They see a nudibranch on the seabed, and then it's shake, rattle and roll. Two minutes later it's disappeared in a cloud of silt as everyone in the group descends on the unfortunate invertebrate.

Wouldn't it be nice if you could communicate with your buddy to share an interesting find without bringing the hordes down upon you?

The German-built Buddy Watcher is a device that could see the end of those insufferable shakers once and for all. My dive buddy Joyce and I tried them out in the waters of St Lucia in the Caribbean.

The Design

The idea of haptic technology or kinaesthetic communication is to harness the sense of touch by applying forces, vibrations or motions to the



user. The Buddy Watcher is a wrist- or arm-mounted device that employs ultrasound frequencies to set off a vibrating alert on a uniquely paired unit, illuminating at the same time a series of small red LED lights.

The range on land is only a few inches but this is claimed to extend to as much as 20m under water. A rechargeable internal battery is sealed inside each unit and is charged via a clip-on facia with gold-plated connections. The

charging lead is split so that two units can be charged simultaneously from a single USB connector via a mobile phone plug or computer.

The Buddy Watcher is constructed using high-grade plastics and comes in black with fluorescent green inserts and buttons. Two large buttons are set on top of the unit, one to set up and pair the devices, and one to call your buddy.

A transparent panel allows the viewing of a series of tiny red coloured LEDs that light



Above:
You really do
watch your
buddy...

Left: Buddy Watcher Diver
communication system.

up when a call is made or received.

The units are depth-rated to 40m. An elasticated mounting band with Velcro fastening completes the specification.

In Use

I fully charged both units a day before setting off to the airport, and took them on our first dive but the batteries were already as dead as a dodo, within two days of charging.

I couldn't be sure if I turned them off before packing or whether they failed to hold their charge. So I recharged them back in my hotel room and took them with me for the following morning's two-tank dive.

Once set up and paired, the units were placed on our upper arms to keep them from obstructing our wrist-mounted dive computers. In this position we found it easy to access and depress the call-buttons.

The first dive was on the wreck of the *Lesleen M*, a great testing ground for haptic technology. I left Joyce on the seabed at the bow of the wreck and swam away, keeping her in sight as I systematically depressed the call button while increasing the distance between us.

I could see her red LED bank illuminate, confirming that she was getting "buzzed".

SPECS

PRICE » 120 euros

DEPTH RATING » 40m

RANGE » Up to 20m in water

CHARGING » USB, dual lead

CONTACT » www.buddy-watcher.de

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

The signal was sent and received up to an estimated distance of around 18m before the units failed to communicate with each other.

The vibrations were very distinctive, and difficult to ignore. On one occasion when I was concentrating on photography Joyce pressed her call button and startled me.

I turned to find her with a mischievous grin, finger perched on her bright green call button with an "It wasn't me" expression plastered on her Chevy Chase.

I was wondering if the signal would be received if a steel-plated hull section separated us, so I left her to peer through a porthole opening while I swam to the other side.

It worked, but I can't be sure if the signal was transmitted through the hole or through the metal plates.

We were surprised and disappointed to find that the batteries on both units had died halfway through the second dive, leaving us to revert to the old-fashioned, tried and tested methods of banging on our tanks to communicate.

Admittedly we were pressing our buttons more than we would have on a normal outing, but one-and-a-half dives?

Conclusion

The Buddy Watcher system will enhance the enjoyment of your dives and, in any case, being able to communicate with your buddy is an essential requirement for diver safety.

The Buddy Watcher performed this task well, with the added advantage of keeping the comms private and targeted.

I was however, very dissatisfied by the power source. The batteries had to be charged immediately before each dive to ensure that they didn't fade, an annoyance at best.

In a modern world in which portable power technology is king, there has to be a better solution.

I hope the guys behind this innovative and useful product can get this sorted out, because if they do they could be onto a winner. ■

EXPOSURE SUIT PINNACLE V-SKIN INFERNO FULLSUIT

THE MERINO IS A BREED OF SHEEP PRIZED FOR ITS WOOL, and shouldn't be confused with Mourinho the manager of the current Premier League champions, although both the Chelsea manager and the sheep do hail from Portugal.

Merinos are regarded as having some of the finest and softest woollen coats of any sheep. This wool is used in high-end performance athletic wear for its excellent insulating properties. It's also able to wick away moisture, and retains warmth when wet.

Also, like most wools, it contains lanolin, which has anti-bacterial properties.

It's no surprise then that the merino wool is being used in high-end wetsuit products. US-based Pinnacle Aquatics has used this natural fibre in its latest exposure suit range – it's called V-Skin. I took the Inferno Fullsuit overseas to check it out.

The Design

Pinnacle's new V-Skin range is a layering system that's claimed to add significant thermal protection without increasing buoyancy. The V-Skin Inferno features a merino lining incorporated into a trilaminate material with a microporous membrane and a high-stretch

Lycra outer layer.

This combination of hi-tec and natural textiles is said to form perfectly with the wearer's body without causing restrictions.

Out of the water, the microporous membrane acts as a barrier to help eliminate wind-chill while allowing moisture and excess heat to escape.

The Inferno Fullsuit is a top-entry garment and needs to be pulled up over the wearer's torso and shoulders. A removable "warm neck collar" zips into place on the rear of the suit and is pulled over the head and tucked into a small pouch on the chest, where it's held securely with Velcro. The collar section can be replaced with an optional hood.

The inside of the suit has a 320g merino wool fleece at the chest and traditional merino wool at the back and sides. The rest of the suit is lined with a technical fleece.

On the outside, a chest overprint aids water run-off and is said to improve wind-resistance. The ankles and cuffs have stirrups to help with donning and to keep the suit in place, although the cuffs need to be rolled up when wearing a drysuit to avoid compromising the wrist-seals.



Pinnacle V-Skin Inferno Fullsuit.



The warm neck collar in place and Velcro'd into its chest pouch.



The collar zips on and off and can be changed for a hood.

Versatility

I took the Inferno Fullsuit on a trip to the Eastern Cape where, with water temperatures in the 20°C range, it was prudent to take a tri-laminate drysuit.

I wore it as an undersuit, and it proved an excellent choice. The V-Skin technology kept me cool enough on the surface, wicking away sweat as we hunkered down on the back of a RIB in the bright South African sun, baitball-spotting for days on end.

It also kept me very warm on the odd occasion when we got into the chilly water. I did have a problem when I needed to answer the call of nature, however, and struggled with the suit's "onesie" concept on more than one occasion.

I later took the Inferno to the Caribbean to wear as a stand-alone wetsuit. I found it surprisingly stretchy, which allowed it (unflatteringly) to conform to my body contours.

SPECS

PRICE ► £230

ACCESSORIES ► V-Skin Hood £33

SIZES ► Female, XS-XL. Male, Small to King 2

CONTACT ► www.sea-sea.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★☆☆

This reduced water flushing through the suit as I was diving and kept me supremely warm on mostly 70-minute dives in water that was around the 26° mark.

The fleece lining felt very soft against my skin, as did the merino-wool areas around my chest and back. The soft neck collar, when pulled over and secured, was also very comfortable.

I would normally use 5kg of lead weight when using a standard 3mm suit and 3kg when diving in a rash vest and shorts. I found that I needed to be exactly in the middle with the Inferno, and used 4kg to be perfectly weighted.

The diving experience in this flexible suit was very enjoyable.

I think it would also be a useful addition to wear under a full neoprene wetsuit when engaged in extended-duration diving in the likes of the Red Sea or Med, although I haven't had the chance to test this – yet.

Conclusion

I'm a big fan of Pinnacle products. The Americans know how to build high-quality wetsuits, although the V-Skin is a bit different from the rest of its gear in that it's made from hi-tec fabrics without a sniff of neoprene. It looks and feels distinctive, and worked like a dream in a variety of diving scenarios.

The figure-hugging form wasn't very flattering on my physique, but who cares? For me nowadays it's all about versatility, comfort and warmth, and this suit excelled in all these departments. ■

REGULATOR SEAC DX 200 ICE

ANYONE WHO'S HAD A REGULATOR FREEZE up on them in cold water will know that it's not a good thing.

I can remember during my instructor days being under water with a pair of trainees at an inland site in midwinter when my regulator started to violently free-flow in my mouth. I couldn't stop it, so we aborted the dive.

Once out of the water I checked my set-up to find that the first stage was frozen solid, with a thick coating of ice preventing the piston from settling on its seat.

The freeze-up occurred because the first stage wasn't sealed from the outside environment and the cold water inside aided by gas depressurising reduced the temperature

enough for ice to form. What I needed to continue diving safely throughout the winter months was a set of regs fit for coldwater diving.

Italian gear maker Seac has recently launched its latest coldwater, environmentally sealed DX 200 ICE regulator, and sent me a set to try.

Environmental Sealing

Those of you who already dive or plan to dive in cold



The DX 200 ICE in use.



water, or who dive in fresh or salt water with high particulate matter, should consider an environmentally sealed regulator.

Sealing the first stage keeps the inside mechanisms from coming into contact with the water and helps to prevent ice forming. It won't fill up with abrasive grit and sand particles either, or end up encrusted with salt crystals in places from which they can't easily be removed.

The Design

The first stage is built from forged brass with a sanded chromium-plated finish, and incorporates a high-performance balanced diaphragm that is totally sealed from the outside environment.

The two high-pressure and four low-pressure outlet ports are evenly distributed either side of the first-stage body. Two of the low-pressure ports are inclined at 20° and both the hp ports at 30° to enable streamlined hose-routing.

The DX 200 ICE has options for 232 bar A-clamp or 300 bar DIN connections.

The second stage is built from lightweight high-grade technopolymer and elastomers with what the makers call a "Luxury Technology" treatment for abrasion resistance. Metal components around the face act as a heat-sink for better coldwater performance.

The second stage features two user-adjustable controls, a dive/pre-dive venturi lever and a breathing-resistance dial.

The first and second stages are connected with a lightweight braided hose, and the whole

SPECS

PRICE ▶ £399

FIRST STAGE ▶ High-performance balanced diaphragm.

PORTS ▶ 4 lp (two set at 20°) and two hp set at 30°

SECOND STAGE ▶ Pre-dive/dive Venturi, breathing resistance dial

CONNECTIONS ▶ 232 bar A-clamp, 300 bar DIN

WEIGHT ▶ 1235g (A-clamp)

NITROX COMPATIBLE ▶ Yes, 40%

CONTACT ▶ www.sea-sea.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★

set-up is compatible for use with up to 40% nitrox and has been awarded a CE EN250:A coldwater rating.

An oversized purge button in Seac's black and silver 40th anniversary livery on the second-stage face completes the package.

In Use

I know the DX 200 ICE was designed and built for frigid waters, but unfortunately (yeah right!) I had to take it to the Caribbean to test it, so I really can't comment on its coldwater attributes.

I can however report that over a week of intensive diving it proved a great performer.

The lightweight braided hose was flexible enough to allow me unrestricted head movement, and the polymer second stage felt

weightless in my mouth. The purge was brilliant to use, thanks to its large size. I could depress it with a single digit from any angle and it immediately delivered enough air to displace any water trapped in the mouthpiece.

The well-thought-out angled first-stage ports streamlined the route of the hoses, keeping them neat, tidy and unobtrusive.

I went through the usual spit the reg out, turn upside-down and breathe heavily with my buddy sharing the octopus routine, and the Seac never wavered.

The mouthpiece was big and comfortable to bite down on. Its moulded silicon has a gum-guard and side-rails that stopped any water seeping in through the corners of my mouth.

Conclusion

Because of the stringent tests diving regulators have to pass to get their CE certificates before they can be sold in Europe, the regulators I test nowadays tend to be much of a muchness in regards to how they behave and breathe under water.

That's good news for me as a tester, because the life-support equipment that's on the market isn't likely to kill me, but the bad news is that they're all very difficult to tell apart.

The Seac DX 200 ICE was no different in this department and so, like most of the modern regulators I test, it was a little bit boring.

No freeflows, no loss of air delivery and no reduction in performance at depth meant that I didn't even have to think about it being in my mouth.

Come to think of it, that's the kind of boring I like. ■

GUEST TEST: UNDERWATER AUDIO SWIMBUDS SPORT HEADPHONES

Would we care to test a pair of Swimbuds Sport Headphones?, asked US manufacturer Underwater Audio. We pointed out that with their 3m depth-rating these accessories would be of limited use to divers (although popping under Swanage Pier might just work).

However, we conceded that holidaying divers often spend a fair proportion of their surface time snorkelling, so those who enjoy a musical soundtrack might find a use for them.

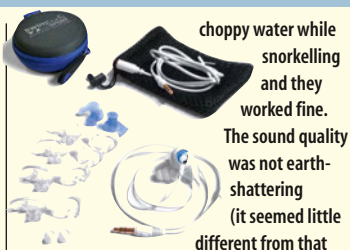
I would call these earphones rather than headphones, and the 3m limit is imposed because the buds should create a waterproof seal, which would create pressure problems below 2 bar. They come with four different tips (one of which, the Ergo for surface activities, is

supplied in four sizes) to help you find the best at staying in and keeping water out, whatever the size and shape of your lugs.

I found that the tips called "Tree" (three overlapping cups of decreasing size) seemed to work best in water, and if the one in my right ear did tend to get displaced occasionally that probably says more about my aural symmetry than about the product.

The 40cm standard cord was fine if I clipped the music-player to my mask or suit-neck, but a useful 1m extension is standard. I was sent a waterproof iPod Shuffle to use but Swimbuds should work with any waterproof music-player with a standard 3.5mm jack.

I tried the 'phones in still and then slightly



choppy water while snorkelling and they worked fine.

The sound quality was not earth-shattering (it seemed little different from that

with the cheap pair that came with my smartphone, which I do find pretty good), but then you're paying for robustness (Swimbuds have a one-year warranty) and the all-important ability to repel water.

My only problem was in anticipating the sort of music to program in. Enya is too

obvious, and while *The Ride of the Valkyries* would be ideal if you suddenly found yourself jumping off a boat among a pod of dolphins, I found it frankly over the top potting about among grazing goatfish.

Ambient music is hardly worth the effort and golden oldies are just irritating when you're trying to be at one with nature.

I found cool jazz and blues OK, or you could try the *Shadow Divers* audio-book, I suppose. Suggestions welcome.

Steve Weinman

PRICE ▶ US \$70, or \$170 complete with waterproof iPod Shuffle.

CONTACT ▶ www.underwateraudio.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★☆☆

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TWIN SETS 232 bar

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Fourth Element Xenos Wetsuits >>>>

The latest addition to Fourth Element's divewear range, Xenos suits feature three models in gender-specific styles. Said to be cut to accommodate a wider range of figures, the suits are built from the maker's own thermocore-lined neoprene and feature stretch panels, Hydrolock seals and cutaway heel sections for easy donning and doffing. There are male and female 3mm and 5mm full suits plus a 3mm shortie, and a choice of colours for the men with black/charcoal or alloy blue, while women's suits come in black/fuchsia. The 3mm suits pictured cost just under £200.

>> www.fourthelement.com

Sharkskin Covert wetsuit <<<<

Australian performance gear-maker Sharkskin has come up with a one-piece, back-zipped suit with "HECS StealthScreen technology" and, it says, Chillproof "micro fleece" material for extra warmth. The suit is designed to protect the wearer from the cold, sun and marine stingers, and can be used under a traditional wetsuit or independently in warmer waters. HECS conductive carbon fibre material is said to reduce the human body's electrical signals, making the wearer less easily detected by underwater marine life. The range includes a full suit, hood and socks, to contain and mask as much of your signal as possible. Price is £350.

>> www.liquidsports.co.uk



Scubapro Seawing Nova Fins >>>>

Scubapro has released "the next generation" of its popular Seawing Nova fins, boasting a new soft, co-moulded, anti-slip pad for improved grip, along with a longer foot-pocket. Using a crescent-shaped baton in the central section and variable thickness in the wings has modified the blade geometry, which is claimed to improve responsiveness and thrust at full power. Seawing Novas cost £135 a pair.

>> www.scubapro.com



Apeks WSX-25 Sidemount Harness System >>>>

The new WSX-25 comes complete with bladder, harness and crotch-strap, D-rings, bungee and accessory butt-pack. The bladder is constructed from Armoguard, a material said to be 10 times more abrasion-resistant than 1000-denier nylon and normally found in public-safety diving and military products. The SlideLock sliding D-ring is exclusive to Apeks, which says it allows the user to change the position of the cylinders easily as buoyancy changes throughout a dive. The two-piece plate and individual webbing system is adjustable to nearly any torso length, making the WSX-25 a one-size-fits-all system. Expect to pay £535, excluding extra trim pockets.

>> www.apekssdiving.com/uk



Olympus Stylus Tough TG-4 Camera & PT-056 Underwater Case ▶▶▶

The TG-4 is a digital compact camera that's waterproof to 15m. It has a 16-megapixel CMOS sensor and an ultra-bright 25-100mm f/2.0-4.9 lens with a maximum aperture of f/1.2. Additional features include RAW support, built-in wi-fi, GPS and manometer, an advanced four-mode Variable Macro system and underwater HDR mode. For depths greater than 15m, the Olympus PT-056 Underwater Case is recommended to house the TG-4 – it is depth-rated to 45m. Expect to pay £575 for the combo.

▶▶ www.camerasunderwater.co.uk



Seiko Prospex Dive Watches ▶▶▶▶

Timepiece-maker Seiko has added new models to its 2015 collection of dive-watches. The Prospex SRP583K1 boasts an automatic movement, stainless case and bracelet with a black ion coating, a black dial with LumiBrite markers and gold accents. The SRP581K1 model has a silicon strap, deep blue elapsed-time bezel and silver accents. Both models have a case diameter of 42mm and stated water-resistance of 200m. They cost £379 and £329 respectively.

▶▶ www.seiko.co.uk



SubGear Meridian LED Strobe Light ▶▶▶▶

The new Meridian Strobe Light is a personal location beacon with two lights that are said to be visible from more than a mile away. It features a white emergency strobe with a claimed burntime of 75 hours and a red locator beacon with burntime of 100 hours. The 100-lumen strobe weighs 101g complete with three AAA batteries and strap and can be attached easily to a BC, says SubGear. The Strobe Light has a shock-resistant body and is waterproof to 100m. The price is £29.

▶▶ www.subgear.de



SKETCHES OF SPAIN

It's cheap to reach, warm, there's plenty to do and the diving isn't half bad either – we check out a couple of Costas



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NEXT ISSUE

CORAL KINGDOM

Majestic dive-sites of the southern Maldives

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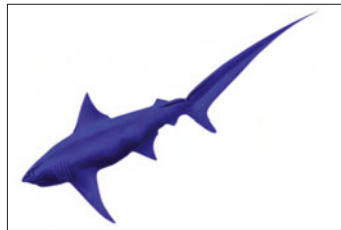
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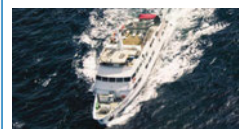
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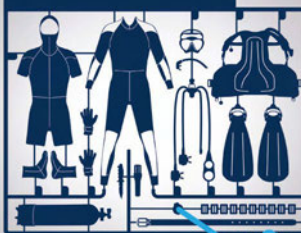
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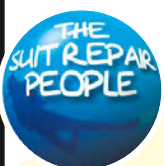
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When a dive community pulls together...

... wonders can be worked, says **DREW McARTHUR**, who has seen what team-work can achieve over the past year in the Cayman Islands

A FEW MINUTES WAS ALL IT TOOK for a cruise ship anchor to destroy thousands of square metres of protected coral reef in Grand Cayman last August. In response to this ecological disaster, a team of volunteer divers formed, intent on saving as much of the damaged habitat as possible.

Over a year, the recovery operation has become so successful that it now owns its own boat, which is used to send out teams of volunteer divers to work on the reef on an almost-daily basis.

When all this began, it was difficult to imagine how this piece of world-famous reef could ever recover. Following a year's worth of hard work, determination and the generosity of concerned businesses and community members, the reef recovery team has managed to create hope of rolling back this tragic situation.

The disaster happened at the end of last August, when the 300m *Carnival Magic* (pictured) dropped anchor in the protected Marine Park on a sizeable patch of healthy coral reef.

While the anchor lay in a bed of shattered marine life the immense chain was pulled through the reef, damaging an estimated 4000sq m of coral. The chain made its mark on top of the wall, which starts at a depth of about 16m and drops a mile to the ocean floor.

FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT, Grand Cayman's Department of Environment (DoE) launched an investigation. It was understood that when cruise ships arrive at the island, the Port Authority assigns them a location at which they are allowed to drop anchor.

Local company Bodden Shipping then directs the ship to the correct spot and signals when to drop the anchor. Establishing whether *Carnival Magic*, Bodden or the Port Authority were ultimately responsible would involve a lengthy and costly court case, and as such the DoE advised against legal action being taken.

Working under the DoE the team of volunteers, drawn mostly from the local dive community, is headed by Lois Hatcher from Ocean Frontiers and Keith Sahm from Sunset House.

Hatcher describes the damage as catastrophic: "With the condition of worldwide coral reefs in steady decline, even up to 80% in some areas, every little piece of coral is important – not only for habitat but for what is left of the fish and marine life."



RENNETT STOWE

Efforts are being assisted by the Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI), a group of scientists who focus on reef recovery. "Conserving coral reefs is at the core of CCMI's mission, so we're committed to helping to restore the site as much as possible," says CCMI conservation scientist Katie Lohr.

"We're helping in whatever way we can, especially by providing supplies, use of our boat, and our

almost every week since the recovery attempts began. Divetech, Don Fosters and Off the Wall are among other Cayman firms that have stepped up and donated resources.

Businesses outside the dive industry have also offered what they can, with places like Subway and Breezes By The Sea providing meals for the volunteer divers, Flowers Water giving bags for lifting work and Fosters Food Fair the milk crates in which surviving corals temporarily live.

As the project took shape, it became apparent that funds would be needed. Requirements such as lift-bags, epoxy, tools and cement all have costs attached to them.

Group leaders also agreed that purchasing a boat would greatly assist logistics, giving the volunteers far more opportunity and flexibility to work on the site.

A FUND-RAISING EVENT in February proved to be a huge success. Money was raised through auctions, raffles and donations from people at the event as well as online.

Awareness of the incident spread through social media to the point where people were actually travelling to Grand Cayman to offer their holiday time as restoration divers.

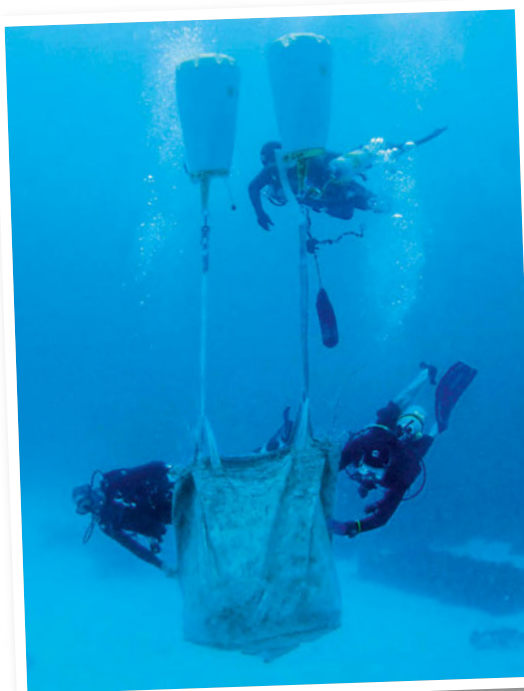
The fund-raising event generated more than US \$30,000, and just a week later *Carnival Magic* broke its silence and pledged a further \$100,000 to the fund as a gesture of goodwill, while making it clear that it still accepted no responsibility for the incident itself.

With the team ready to start pouring concrete on the dead areas to create a solid base for new life, this pot of money came in at just the right time.

We divers are fortunate enough to see parts of the planet of which others can only dream. We also, however, have front-row tickets to see the destructive effect that humans have on the ocean.

As sad as it is to see yet another blow to Mother Nature, witnessing the efforts that some people will make to help the environment can be inspirational.

The reef restoration project in Grand Cayman is a perfect example of how, if we work together, we can help to make positive change, no matter how hopeless it may seem.



scientific expertise in the field of coral-reef ecology and restoration.

"Volunteers have been working since the incident occurred to remove rubble and secure dislodged pieces of live coral," says Lohr. "They have helped to mitigate coral mortality by securing dislodged corals in milk crates on the seafloor, improving their chance of survival. However, it's imperative that corals are reattached to the reef as soon as possible to encourage long-term survival."

It's not only divers donating their time – several local businesses are also contributing towards the effort. Watersports operator Red Sail has been providing boats from which the volunteers can dive

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